Marxism Today

Theoretical and Discussion Journal of the Communist Party December 1976 30 pence

Editorial Comments

Peter B. Smith

North Sea Oil and Gas—Its Past and Future

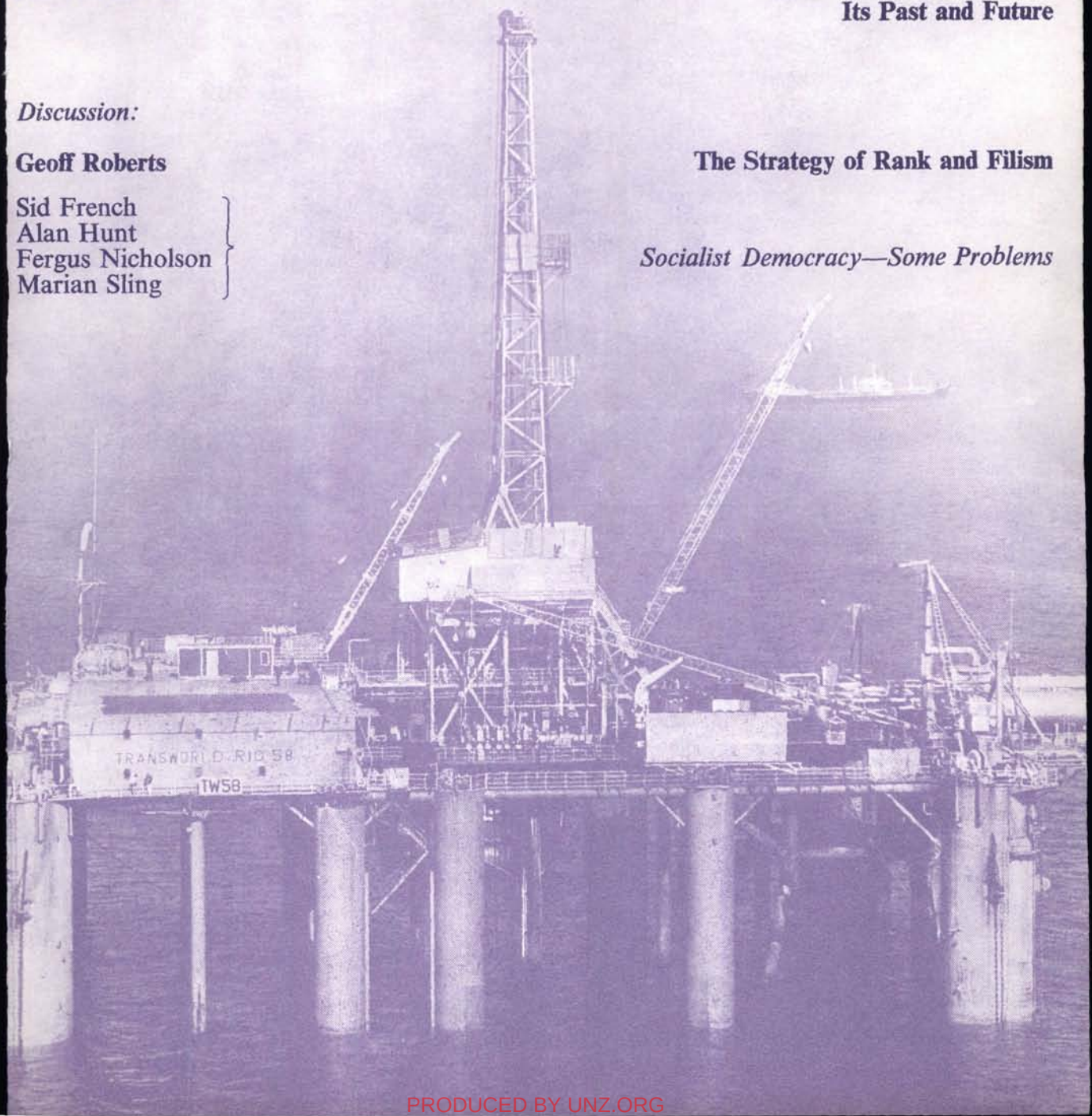
Discussion:

Geoff Roberts

The Strategy of Rank and Filism

Sid French
Alan Hunt
Fergus Nicholson
Marian Sling

Socialist Democracy—Some Problems



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Marxism Today

Theoretical and Discussion Journal of the Communist Party

Volume 20, Number 12

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The front cover was designed by Pat Cook

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Editorial Comments

WITH his Richard Dimbleby Lecture[1] Lord Hailsham can justifiably claim, in the best Lloyd George tradition, to be a sort of inverted marxist, standing on his head.

Marxists in a whole number of countries, including Britain, have been arguing that it is incorrect to present Parliament as a simple piece of the capitalist state, which needs to be removed, smashed or replaced in the process of socialist revolution.

On the contrary, they have claimed, Parliament is an object, an arena, of struggle, and the combined strength of the mass movement outside Parliament with the struggle within it, can bring about its radical transformation into a representative organ of a progressive majority.

Indeed, the political advance of the left forces in Italy and in France have shown that this is not just a *theoretical* approach, but a practical possibility.

We have often noted how the British capitalists, when they are thwarted by the rules of the political game which they have themselves established, show an eager desire to change the rules.

Once the bloc vote of the great trade unions was greeted by the establishment as a welcome weapon of moderation. When the unions that composed it moved (democratically) left, it became for the tories a monstrous imposition of bureaucracy.

For centuries Parliamentary rule has been vaunted as Britain's supreme contribution to the western way of life. But if the Labour Party went left (however democratically) and Parliament became representative of a militant left *and democratic majority, it would become*—this is Lord Hailsham's nightmare—an 'elective dictatorship'.

We can see what is upsetting him. Proportional representation is too democratic. Our own existing type of elections, he says, "at least tends to put the moderates in our large national parties in charge, to some extent, of their own extremists. . . ".

Above all he fears, in the new world situation of political struggle, the 'sovereignty of parliament', once his boast, but which now opens the, grim for him, possibility of a progressive, democratic, socialist-orientated House of Commons.

When the Communist Programme—*The British Road to Socialism*—becomes a real perspective, Lord Hailsham like a French bourgeois politician, long ago quoted by Marx, proclaims 'la légalité nous tue' (legality kills us). We must change the rules, he declares. The long-vaunted sovereignty of Parliament is becoming dangerous. So let it be subjected to a safer authority, to the judges, who are not elected, but selected from the best families, from the right educational background, and for whom consciously or unconsciously, loyalty to the law, means in the first place, loyalty to capitalism.

PRIME-MINISTER-POWER

Tony Benn in his review of Sir Harold Wilson's recent book—*The Governance of Britain*—has spotlighted the fact that at the head of what is loudly proclaimed as a most advanced democratic system, is a person with powers as great as those of a medieval monarch, exercising them in the most undemocratic manner, for he is not required to consult either the cabinet or parliament, the public or his Party, when so doing.

Sir Harold appointed or reshuffled 100 Cabinet Ministers, 403 non-Cabinet Ministers, created 243 Peers, appointed 24 chairmen of nationalised industries, controlling one-fifth of our gross national product, and 16 chairmen of Royal Commissions. He kept a very tight control over information about the government. Every invitation to a minister to broadcast had to be cleared by him and he vetoed many of them.

Benn pinpoints the source of the Prime Minister's power in his control over patronage, his power to offer well-paid jobs which carry increased status. For there is nothing so effective in securing agreement as the hope of advancement or the threat of dismissal to those holding much sought after jobs.

All this plus increasing Cabinet Government, the powerful role of top civil servants in formulating policy, the growing trend to authoritarianism, emphasise the great need on the part of the labour movement and all

[1] *The Listener*, October 21, 1976.

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progressive forces to defend and extend our democratic rights and to mount a counter-attack on all such undemocratic practices and institutions.

THE TAMERS TAMED?

"He was the easiest Foreign Minister, I have ever had to manage", a Senior (permanent!) Foreign Office official was heard to mutter after experiencing Ramsay MacDonald in the Foreign Office of the first Labour Government. "He came, he saw, he was conquered" was another verdict. R. H. S. Crossman's *Diaries* provide plenteous modern proof as to how Ministries manage Ministers rather than the reverse.

In this context there was an interesting special report by Hugo Young in the *Sunday Times* of September 19, printed under the title "How Whitehall's Mandarins Tamed Labour's 38 Special Advisers".

The partial recognition of this whole taming—process of Ministers in successive Labour Governments—a recognition much more pragmatic than theoretical—led to a case being made during the sixties in the Labour Party evidence to the Fulton Commission on the Civil Service for the appointment of special Labour Party advisers to Labour Ministers.

The proposition was for "temporary advisers" who could help the Ministers carry through their policy and constitute a staff of assistants (up to four) owing loyalty to Ministers and Party rather than to the Civil Service establishment.

The idea was reinforced, Young claims, by the defeat of the 1964-70 Wilson governments when, in the course of the various inquests, considerable blame had been attached to the partiality of the Civil Service.

Eventually 38 Labour Advisers were appointed to the next set of Labour Ministers, a figure which has now, he says, been reduced to 23. "Many have gone", he writes, "few have come". Nor, he argues, have these appointments in general been a success:

> "For the most part their influence has been, on their own confession, marginal, and they have left the methods and prejudices of the Civil Service untouched".

For this relative failure he gives three reasons. The first is the shortcomings in many of the advisers themselves. Secondly, their responsibilities were never properly defined, i.e., in theory "political" advisers they lived under civil service discipline which forbade political activity. Thirdly, a number of Ministers, convinced that they themselves were in no danger of being taken over by their permanent officials, refused to make use of such Advisers.

Clearly the recognition by the Labour Party that there *was* a problem of the class nature of the state in general and of the civil service in particular, was in itself a step forward when so many generations of right-wing labour leaders had proclaimed and accepted the 'impartiality' of the State. Equally clearly, Labour Advisers could only play a very limited progressive role unless steps were taken deeply to democratise the civil service, and only then if the advisers themselves were clear on the problems which they faced and ready, militantly, to face them.

But their appointment *was* a progressive step. At first the permanent officials protested and expressed their righteous concern. Was not the purity of the 'unbiased' civil service being violated?

But the British ruling class is very cunning. So often in its history it has struggled against reforms, and, when it could not prevent them, worked successfully to turn defeat into victory, or at least mitigate the effect of the reform by adapting the reforms to 'the system' or gradually rendering them harmless.

The claim that the Labour Advisers set up in order to defend the Labour Ministers from a senior civil service carefully selected by the capitalist class, were themselves in process of incorporation, that the tamers were being tamed, is a very significant one that warrants investigation.

AN INTERNATIONAL DISCUSSION IN PROBLEMS OF SOCIALISM

An international Round Table meeting on 'Socialism in the World' was held at Cavtat, near Dubrovnik, in Yugoslavia from September 27 to October 2. At the invitation of three leading Yugoslav theoretical journals 60 marxists and socialist theoreticians (including four from Britain) met to discuss with Yugoslav colleagues the main problems facing socialists in the capitalist, socialist and third worlds. The importance attached to the conference in Yugoslavia was shown by the prominent coverage given to it day by day by the country's press and TV, and by the attendance and contributions of four members of the Presidium of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia: comrades Bakaric, Grlickov, Popovic and Vrhovec.

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The keynote for the Round Table was provided by Dusan Popovic in his opening address. "Important ideological-political differences exist among movements and thinkers fighting today for socialism, and against imperialism," he said. "A regrettably long time has elapsed since any real discussion has taken place among marxists, among scientists and scholars from communist, socialist, social democratic and other progressive parties and movements. There has been quite a lot of unilateral condemnation, exclusiveness of views, name-calling, glossing over and underrating of the socialist practice of others. . . . Sterile, unprincipled political confrontations and accusations must be opposed with efforts to develop broad principled theoretical discussion."

The conference provided an opportunity for a free and wide-ranging exchange of views between French, and Finnish left-wing socialists, Scandinavian Social Democrats, non-Party marxists from Western Germany and the USA and communists from both capitalist and socialist countries, as well as socialists and national liberation fighters from Africa and the Middle East. Argument ranged over the function of the state in developed capitalist countries (on which Nicos Poulantzas of Paris had submitted a paper), problems of working class unity, anti-monopoly alliances and socialist strategy generally (with papers from Yuri Krasin of Moscow; Pierre Joye, Lucio Libertini and Seiichi Ishida of the Belgian, Italian and Japanese Communist Parties; Jean-Pierre Chevènement and Francisco Bustelo of the French and Spanish Socialist Parties; Ele Alenius, President of the People's Democratic Alliance of Finland) and the question of the transition to socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat (dealt with by Jean-Pierre Cotten of the French Communist Party).

A lively controversy developed around the contention of Arghiri Emmanuel (Paris) and Anouar Abdel-Malik (Cairo) that the "privileged" working class in western capitalist countries had lost the potential for revolution which had shifted to the Third World.

The discussion on socialist society, brought out the differences in approach and conception to the problems of socialist self-management in particular between Soviet and Yugoslav marxists, the latter having submitted a number of papers based on their country's experiences in this field. It also gave an opportunity to Italian, Japanese, Belgian, French Spanish and British communists to bring out their common conception of pluralist socialist democracy (on which Monty Johnstone of the British Communist Party had submitted a paper) and to reply to some objections raised by some participants from socialist countries.

In the sessions devoted to the Third World, the question was discussed of the ability of anti-colonial revolutions to develop a socialist content even when their working class was small, as was argued by Pedro Avesh, of the MPLA (Angola) and a number of Yugoslav participants. A controversy also developed around the contention of Senator Lelio Basso (Italy) that it was a mistake to characterise the military dictatorships in Latin America as fascist, with Clodomiro Almeida (Chile) and a number of other Latin American delegates strongly arguing an opposite view.

Controversy was often hard-hitting but took place in a spirit of respect for different points of view on the part of all participants. The Yugoslav chairmen went out of their way to give those whose papers (submitted in advance in writing) or contributions had been criticised ample time to reply. Since participants attended in their individual capacity and the aim of the conference was to explore a wide range of different opinions within the spectrum of world socialism, no attempt was made to adopt an agreed statement. However, by providing a unique forum for the expression of these viewpoints, the Round Table was able to give a lead, in Dusan Popovic's words, "in bridging various prejudices, transcending narrow-mindedness, bias and the like," and thus fostering "forms of equal co-operation between socialist forces".

The undoubted success of the conference led its Yugoslav organisers to announce that another Round Table will be held at Cavtat next year, probably on a theme less broad than that chosen for the first one. Meanwhile the papers and transcript of the proceedings of Round Table '76 are to be published in Serbo-Croat and at least one other language.

'BERUFSVERBOT'

The West German Union of Democratic Scientists (Bund der Demokratischer Wissenschaftler) has circulated a statement to university teachers and scientists everywhere about the impact of the vicious 'Berufsverbot' on science and on the development of knowledge.

Defining 'Berufsverbot' as a "specific

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method of political discrimination and oppression of active democrats, communists, socialists, social-democrats, members of trade unions, progressive liberals and non-party members", it explains that such measures result in endangering "not only the social existence of those concerned but also intellectual freedom, the universal exchange of views, a critical literature and progressive science and art".

It warns against the dangers of indifference towards this development in the German Federal Republic, emphasising the danger of its export elsewhere in view of West Germany's leading position in Western Europe.

It gives facts and figures about the extent of the 'Berufsverbot' taken from official government sources, warning that these are in fact an under-estimation:

> Cases of 'Berufsverbot' (i.e. those who have actually been dismissed for their political views about 3,000
>
> Files on people in connection with the 'Berufsverbot' in the possession of the political police about 6,500
>
> Number of people investigated from 1972-1976 (i.e. people brought for questioning before special investigating tribunals) about 800,000

University teachers and scientists are the professional group with the highest number of Berufsverbot victims after school teachers who rank first. Among them are Professor Horst Holzer (sociologist), Professor Wolf-Dieter Narr (political scientist), Dr. Johannes Meyer-Ingermann (German literature), Dr. Richard Hiep (History of Art), Dr. Ernest Mandel (Economics), all with well established academic reputations in Western Germany and some with international reputations in their own fields.

The statement recalls that the 'Berufsverbot' are an offence against the UN 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' and contradict UNESCO guidelines in its 'Recommendations on the Status of Scientific Researchers'.

We urge teachers, university teachers, trade unionists, members of all political parties and of all progressive organisations to play their part in the struggle against this persecution of progressive people for their political opinions and activities in the Federal German Republic.

Resolutions and petitions of protest should be sent to the Embassy of the Federal German Republic, 23 Belgrave Square, London, SW1 (copy to—Bund der Demokratischer Wissenschaftler, Postfach 1162, D-3550 Marburg/Lahn, Federal German Republic).

LESLIE MORTON AS POET

Some time before the First World War a small boy rode in a trap with his father to a neighbouring village to buy a calf:

> Numbness of fingers
> dividing apples and cake
> *and my father's voice*
> 'Travellers must share and share'.

Growing up, he found that the justice and fair dealing learned in the family 'did not run outside four walls', once you were out in the world of 'bent backs and upright chimneys'. He heard talk of justice in a new tongue, 'true warfaring talk':

> "So I became
> Whatever I now am".

The small boy was A. L. Morton, one of the first and most eminent Marxist historians; author of the *People's History of England*, popular all over the world since it first appeared in the 1930s, and of *Socialism in Britain* and *The World of the Ranters*; and a deeply perceptive Marxist literary critic (*Language of Men, The English Utopia, The Matter of Britain*). Now for the first time he has published a volume of the poems he wrote as a young man, before and during the Second World War, some of which were printed at the time in *Left Review* and other journals.[2]

Morton is a countryman, rooted all his life in East Anglia; in the thirties he led the hunger marchers from Norwich to London, and until very recently he was a member of the East Anglia Committee of the Communist Party. The imagery and tone of these short lyric poems is linked with this; the sense of change, love, vitality or conflict expressed often in sharp contrasting natural or physical images of fields, crops, trees and wind. The war and its frustrations, for example, is evolved with an economy and understatement that suggests Chinese poems:

> The cookhouse smoke
> Coils up behind the willows.
>
> Soon, like the first snail,
> The first kit is dragged into the sun,
> Reluctantly across the beaded grass.
>
> The sun begins to burn
> and the bones to rejoice.

Politics comes in small mind pictures in *October 1942*:

[2] A. L. Morton, *Collected Poems*, Lawrence & Wishart, 91 pp, £1.00.

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We grow perfect in the drill
Our buttons shine
Our boots lack nothing

In Paris
hungry men steal rifles
fashion grenades in cellars

Morton's long interest in the English popular cultural tradition (seen in his historical writings on the early Utopians and on the Levellers) shapes some of the most moving poetry, as here on William Blake:

Had he but followed out a plan
Laid down for him by men with sense,
And been an educated man
He'd not have lifted his eyes far hence,
And seen the Golden Builders laying
Their scaffolding upon the air
In spots unsanctioned by the muses
like Paddington and Golden Square.

These are simple and attractive poems to read; remembered, they haunt the mind with subtler implied meanings. Some are directly political, most are very personal and the personal voice is that of a communist. They are a reminder that marxist historical imagination and insight are not opposite from, but closely bound up with, creative practice and power.

A NOTE ON CARCANET PRESS

Interested in the Carcanet Press which has just published this important selection from the writings of John Cornford, we wrote asking for some information about its work and aims.

Michael Schmidt a Director writes:

"Carcanet Press grew out of an ailing Oxford/Cambridge literary magazine of that name in 1969. In 1970 it began publishing books (previously it had issued only pamphlets of poetry), and in 1971 it adopted a policy which has governed its tenuous progress ever since.

"Most small poetry presses concentrate on 'the contemporary' exclusively—and 'the contemporary' frequently comes to mean 'the local', 'the parochial' or 'the marketable'. This has not been the case in a few instances —notably Anvil Press Poetry, Trigram, and Enitharmon.

"Carcanet's policy has four elements in it. Its principal interest is in modern English verse, and it has published a number of first and second collections, books by known poets (Jon Silkin, Edwin Morgan, Michael Hamburger, Christopher Middleton, Elizabeth Jennings, HD), and of neglected poets, including C. H. Sisson and the outstanding Marxist poet and critic Edgell Rickword.

"The second area of interest is in these writers' other work. We wanted to present them 'in the round'—their prose work and graphic work as well as their verse, when such treatment was merited. The best books in this series include Rickword's *Essays and Opinions 1921-31*, from which can be seen the evolution of Rickword's seminal Marxist intelligence; Christopher Middleton's forthcoming *Bolshevism in Art and Other Expository Writings*, as well as prose books by Sisson, Donald Davie, Edwin Morgan, HD, Adrian Stokes, and others.

"The third area of interest is rediscovery—of neglected figures from the distant and recent past, from Charles of Orleans to Peele and Vaughan, to Young and Swift and Thomson, Landor and Barnes, the Bronte Sisters. In this century, too, we have attended to the work of John Cornford (*Understand the Weapon, Understand the Wound*) and Delmore Schwartz, the American poet, closely associated with the foundation of the *Partisan Review* in its early radical phase.

"The final area of interest has been in translations of modern and classical verse. Our list has concentrated on Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Though the work of dissident writers such as Gorbanevskaya is included on the list, we were impatient with the presentation of predominantly the work of dissidents in the West. A false view of a rich and varied literature was being fostered. Our list came to include a number of writers central to Russian poetry—Tvardovsky (editor of *Novi Mir*) and Vinokurov (poetry editor of *Novi Mir* at the present time); Attila Jozsef of Hungary; the great Russians of the revolutionary period including Mayakovsky and Esenin, and many others. We also published Hikmet's poems—the outstanding Turkish Communist who died in exile; and the work of the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. He, too, is a Communist writer of great interest. Our list of Classical translations includes the first verse translation of Lucretius undertaken for many years—successfully —by C. H. Sisson; translations of Horace, Virgil, and others.

"Supplementing this activity are our critical anthologies and poetry anthologies—in the former category critical books on British, Irish and American literature today; and in the latter category anthologies of East German, Modern German, Portuguese and Scottish Poetry.

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"Our publishing aim has been to produce a balanced list—in effect a literary list in the best sense, broadly based with, at the same time, certain standards of excellence hard to maintain on a tiny budget. We have published, in seven years, about 200 items, 150 of them books. In our early days finance came exclusively from the directors' pockets. Later the Press became a Limited Company and introduced twelve shareholders. In recent years the Arts Council has contributed substantially to the Press's survival. Currently it is run by two directors and a part-time secretary from 330-332 Corn Exchange Buildings, Manchester."

PHYSICISTS AND MARXISM

There is an interesting short article on 'Physicists and Marxism' in *France Nouvelle*, weekly journal of the French Communist Party, by Robert Peschanski of the Saclay Study Centre[3].

He discusses a contradiction. On the one hand there exists amongst physicists, in his opinion, a deep suspicion of philosophy, and of marxist philosophy especially—an attitude which contrasts with the rapid advance of progressive *political* ideas in scientific circles.

Part of this suspicion can be attributed to past dogmatic errors, to claims to be able to judge on the basis of philosophy alone the correctness or falsehood of scientific theories.

But on the other hand, he notes amongst *younger* scientists a growing 'hunger for marxism'.

It would be equally wrong, in his opinion, to return to the old dogmatic approaches *or* to support the attitude that scientists have no use for philosophy. The question should be discussed patiently and with care.

The fundamental approach of marxist philosophy—indeed what distinguishes it from so-called 'classical' philosophy—is to start from what is real, drawing general lessons from this, and *not* trying to impose a 'system' on reality.

SCIENCE BULLETIN

There are some challenging thoughts from Colin Page in a discussion of university course content in the most recent *Science Bulletin* of the Communist Party.[4]

It is necessary, he writes, to "encourage young people to incorporate science and technology in their education experience. Many educators are beginning to recognise the need for courses of study that involve of the social, natural and engineering sciences". He discusses how this can be done.

In the same issue Colin Beardon and John Deal discuss *Scientists and the Student Left*, Roy Johnston writes on *Science in Ireland* and Giovanni Berlinguer, head of the Scientific Research office of the Italian Communist Party, describes its functions and organisation.

COGITO COGITATES

Cogito is the theoretical and discussion journal of the Young Communist League. Two contributions in the most recent issue[5] are both extremely interesting in themselves and provide an excellent basis for developing discussion.

The first by Paul Bradshaw, editor of *Challenge*, based on a report given to the June meeting of the YCL Executive, is a study of *Trends in Youth Culture in the 1970's*. He examines changes in the position of the British youth in the first years of the seventies in contrast to the latter years of the sixties, including such questions as the influence of the Women's Liberation Movement, the life of the young people in the inner city areas of high density population, the outlook and actions of the Black and the Asian youth, the upsurge of community activity, and developments of popular culture.

The second is a discussion article, prepared for the same June meeting, on 'Women in Society'.

Contributors write from the North West and Aberdeen on problems of building the YCL and there is an informative article on developments in the Caribbean.

[3] *France Nouvelle*, October 25, 1976.

[4] *Science Bulletin: Communist Science and Technology Journal*, 1976, No. 12, 20p.

[5] *Cogito*, No. 2, 1976, 30p.

Correction

The quotations from Louis MacNeice's *Autumn Journal* quoted in Margot Heinemann's article on "Poetry in the Thirties" in the November issue of *Marxism Today* were taken from *The Collected Poems of Louis MacNeice*, ed. E. R. Dodds (Faber and Faber, 1966), pp. 101-153. We regret that this reference was inadvertently omitted.

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North Sea Oil and Gas—Its Past and its Future

Peter B. Smith

(The author lectures on economics at the Glasgow College of Technology and is Communist Parliamentary candidate for the Maryhill Division in Glasgow.)

Any meaningful analysis of the actual course of development of the oil and gas fields in the British sector of the North Sea must be set within the framework of the crisis of British imperialism in particular and that of international imperialism in general. Only in such a context can the impact of oil price increases be evaluated internationally or can an explanation be given for the massive US penetration of the North Sea offshore and onshore oil and gas industry.

Only in such a context can the purported massive balance of payments 'savings' due to oil and gas be reconciled with the abject failure of 12 years of North Sea fuel development to bring about even the beginnings of a noticeable restructuring of the British economy or provide a substantial amount of new employment. On the one hand, there is the prediction of a net export position on oil by 1980-82 which will 'save' some £3,000-£3,500 million (in 1974 prices) on the balance of payments. On the other hand, the virtual certainty that the 60,000/65,000 jobs created to date represent peak employment with a gradual falling off by the late 1970s.

Simply put, the explanation seems to be that the British ruling class, committed to Common Market membership since the early 1960s, opted to utilise the oil and gas in such a manner as to, as they saw it, maximise their drive into the Common Market. Capital outflow to penetrate the West European economies could be 'covered' at the balance of payments level by the oil and gas 'savings', or at least such 'cover' could be bought by mortgaging future oil production. Political support was also purchased by allowing US monopoly oil companies favourable entry to the North Sea.

UK private direct investment overseas has risen from an outflow of around £260 million in 1964, to £540 million in 1970, to around £1,600 million in 1973. Over the same period private domestic capital investment has fallen sharply. Every effort was made by successive British governments to bring forward the production dates in the North Sea, so much so as to preclude the building up of a domestic oil industry of any stature.

Only a totally bankrupt capitalism, fighting for its very imperialist life, would, firstly, so weaken its domestic industrial base by running down domestic capital investment and, secondly, would squander the enormous resources provided by the North Sea fuels in such a way as not to even try to regenerate its domestic economy!

This bankruptcy must be challenged, not by providing technical economic solutions, but by integrating the glaring contradiction between the present state of affairs with respect to the North Sea fuels and the economic potential which they would allow if socially planned, into our party's alternative programme.

This essay attempts to analyse the underlying forces leading to the present situation and to point the way forward to a class policy on the North Sea fuels.

1. NORTH SEA OIL AND THE NON-SOCIALIST WORLD'S OIL SUPPLIES

The price of exploration for and exploitation of oil in the North Sea, from the point of view of the international oil companies, is directly linked to the growing ability of the oil-producing countries and their cartel, the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), to enforce their terms on the oil companies that operate within their state boundaries.

The dramatic rises in the price of crude oil from the OPEC countries which occurred at the time of the last Arab/Israeli war need to be examined in the context of the workings and structure of the world's largest industry—the oil industry.

Outside North America and the socialist states the 'international majors' dominate oil production and distribution. Five out of these seven giant monopolies have their headquarters and almost all their shareholders in the US. They are Standard Oil of New Jersey (*Esso*), Standard Oil of New York (*Mobiloil*), Standard Oil of California (*Chevron*), Gulf Oil and Texaco.

The other two 'international majors' are the Royal Dutch/Shell group and British Petroleum.

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Shell is owned 60 per cent by Dutch shareholders and 40 per cent by British shareholders and, although its operational and commercial headquarters are in London, there is a 4.3 split of managing directorships in favour of the Dutch. British Petroleum is almost entirely British-owned and the British Government has—not surprisingly, given the key role of oil for monopoly capitalism—a 49 per cent shareholding in the company which dates from 1913.[1]

The Majors

In 1970 the 'majors' were responsible for about 80 per cent of all oil production outside of the socialist states and North America and in the same area they owned or controlled over 70 per cent of the total refining capacity and operated either directly, or indirectly through long-term charter, well over 50 per cent of the tonnage of internationally operating tankers. These percentages were slightly smaller in 1970 than a few years previously and since 1970 they have diminished further owing to nationalisation measures in the Middle East and the growing activities of state capitalist and 'smaller' capitalist oil companies such as Compagnie Française des Pétroles (CFP), Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (ENI), and others.

The foreign assets of the 'seven' are massive. For example, assets in excess of £5,000 million are invested in oil abroad by US companies and this accounts for around one-third of total US foreign investment. In 1969 oil industry earnings sent back to the US were estimated as being in excess of $1,750 million. This was about $400 million more than the total cost of that country's oil imports and the outflow of funds to finance further overseas oil investment.

The OPEC countries have squeezed the oil companies in three ways. Firstly, prices of crude oil have been raised; secondly, far harder terms are enforced on the oil companies' production facilities which in some cases have resulted in the outright nationalisation of western-owned companies such as the Iraq Petroleum Company; and, thirdly, the OPEC countries aim to permanently cut back the growth of oil production from their states.

Taken together, these mean that other, generally new, sources of oil must be found. If not, the growth of the world's monopoly capitalist economies will be—given present technology—constrained by oil shortages, as will the profits of the international majors! In this situation North Sea oil is "manna from heaven" for the 'majors' and the 'independent' oil companies.

[1] This does not include the Burmah shareholding in BP taken up by the government after the collapse of the former company.

2. HOW MUCH NORTH SEA OIL AND GAS?

To date, nearly 50 oil discoveries have been made on the UK Continental Shelf, nearly half of them since the beginning of 1975. Of the 50, some 14 have already proved 'commercial' and are under development.[2] Two UK fields are already in production[3] and BP are currently attributing recent profit increases to production from its Forties Field.[4]

Estimates of the commercially exploitable oil and gas reserves in the North Sea vary depending on who makes them and to what end they use them. One writer noted that:

> "There is a natural tendency within the operating companies to use minimum estimates of recoverable reserves when assessing the return to be obtained from the very large capital investment required to put a field into production."[5]

The concept of 'reserves' is, of course, dependent on the rate of extraction in terms of the *life span of the reserves,* and, as will be shown below, there are some grounds for believing that extraction rates in the North Sea will be high, thus reducing the life-span of the fields.

The Government's latest estimates suggest that proven reserves stand at around 1,450 million tons, with the possible total being around 5,000 million tons, with forecast production being of the order of 100-125 million tons by 1980.[6]

Earlier production estimates for the UK sector ranged from 150 million tons by 1980 (Dr. Birks of BP) to 100 million tons by 1980 (Aberdeen University).[7]

Exploration pace as well as exploitation rates are, of course, dependent on a number of factors, thus updating of reserve estimates is a regular feature. For example, in 1973 the editor of the *Petroleum Times* noted that:

> "with the value of crude oil rising at such a fantastic rate, the need to provide oil resources and the profit motive will see to it that undoubtedly the North Sea programmes of the large range of 150 groups comprising some 500 companies will be stepped up."[8]

[2] *Benefits of North Sea Oil*—Scottish Office for the Oil Development Council for Scotland.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Financial Times*, Friday, September 3, 1976.

[5] *Petroleum Press Service*, October 1973.

[6] *Development of Oil and Gas Resources of the UK 1976*, Dept. of Energy, pp. 4-5. Figures converted from metric tonnes and rounded up.

[7] *Petroleum Economist*, January 1974, and Department of Political Economy, Aberdeen University, 1973.

[8] December 1973.

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Self-sufficiency by Early 1980s

Such factors may in the future retard or speed-up exploration and exploitation. Nevertheless, no matter which estimates of reserves or production is taken, it cannot be doubted that by the early 1980s net self-sufficiency in oil can be achieved in the British economy; indeed the oil companies will in the aggregate become net exporters of oil.

There is a tendency for most sections of capitalist commentary to underplay the gas production and reserves in the North Sea. In 1975 over 37 billion cubic metres of natural gas were brought ashore and this represented some 97 per cent of total UK gas supplies leading to a 'saving' on the balance of payments of over £1,000 million.[9]

Any over-concentration on oil at the expense of the gas side of the North Sea production fails to evaluate the overall impact of North Sea fuels, in particular the profits accruing to the production companies and the role of the British Gas Corporation.

In world terms (and given the above estimates) the North Sea will not be a major source of oil and gas. Of non-socialist oil reserves, the North Sea accounts for only just over 2 per cent. However, in the light of British government policy and US penetration of the North Sea (expanded on below), perhaps the real measure of the importance of the North Sea fuels is that they represent just under 20 per cent of US oil reserves!

In a West European context it is certain that Britain will be the major West European producer with some 50-60 per cent of total North Sea output, so that there can be little doubt that the economic and political impact of oil and gas on Britain's international relations are likely to be massive and complex.

3. GOVERNMENT POLICY AND MONOPOLY PROFITS

Table I, which is taken from the first report of the Committee of Public Accounts, produced in the 1972/73 Parliamentary session, on North Sea oil and gas indicates the general position with respect to who holds what in the North Sea. Total British interest in territory licensed at that time amounted to 32 per cent (Shell being taken as 40 per cent British).

The ownership of proven reserves gives a figure of around 30 per cent for British interests, so that some 70 per cent is held by foreign international oil companies, dominated by the US big 'five'!

It is not difficult to show that this penetration was the result of, if not also the intention of, UK government policy. At no time in the granting of exploration licenses has any real attempt been made by governments to differentiate favourably towards UK companies and more importantly towards the nationalised industries. Further, the terms of the licenses remained virtually unchanged for almost a decade notwithstanding the proven nature of the North Sea fuels at the end of the period. From paragraph 97 of the above report:

> . . . (14) "The most striking fact to emerge from our review of the four rounds of licensing is that the terms for each, apart from the limited tender experiment, have remained virtually unchanged since they were fixed in 1964, before any discoveries had been made and when the potentialities of the [Continental] shelf were unknown."

TABLE I

TERRITORY HELD BY:

LICENSING ROUND	PUBLIC SECTOR				*Other British Interests*	*Total British Interests*
	Gas Council	*NCB*	*HMG Share 48.6% of BP*	*Total*		
	%	%	%	%	%	%
1	4.5	2.1	2.6	9.2	13.5	22.7
2	7.6	4.5	3.4	15.5	18.1	33.6
3	10.1	4.5	5.4	20.0	16.5	36.5
4 Auction	2.1	6.2	1.7	10.0	10.0	20.0
Discretion	3.0	2.3	4.3	9.6	25.1	34.7
Total	2.9	2.5	4.2	9.6	24.4	34.0
Overall	5.0	3.0	4.0	12.0	20.0	32.0

US Penetration

Under questioning from a member of the Com-

[9] *Development of Oil and Gas Resources, op. cit.*, p. 2.

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mittee of Public Accounts, Sir Robert Marshall, Secretary of the DTI, answered on the penetration of US companies in the supply side of North Sea operations—though it seems equally applicable to production operations as well:

> "Yes . . . the bulk of the oil industry is foreign. Next to the Americans this country has the largest single stake in it, but simply following the great emphasis of American enterprise in the petroleum industry established across the world, American suppliers are the most prominent and *it was quite clear that the faster one went and the less notice that was given towards exploitation and exploration plans in the North Sea, the less the immediate share of British industry.*" (Emphasis added.)

The faster one went—the greater the pace of exploration and exploitation—the greater the degree of US monopoly oil interest penetration! This has been the result of government policies which were aimed at achieving maximum balance of payments savings rather than the planned, progressive build-up of a UK oil industry!

The recent introduction of the state-run British National Oil Corporation (BNOC) to oversee government oil holdings in the North Sea and to enter into participation agreements with the production companies[10] will undoubtedly increase the proportion of output in UK hands, but does not alter the fundamental position with respect to US penetration.

The introduction of the Petroleum Revenue Tax (PRT), with rules to protect the minimum rate of return to the companies, does increase the tax-take to the government, but predictions as to amounts over the next decade are difficult to make due to the effect of some companies offsetting profits created in Britain against tax losses made elsewhere. Prof. Mackay of Aberdeen University estimates (given certain assumptions) that the percentage government tax-take from the Forties, Piper and Argyll fields will be 75.1, 74.0 and 63.2 respectively of the companies' net revenue before tax and royalties. Mackay further estimates that the government tax-take from known commercial fields will rise from £80 million in 1976 to £1,450 million in 1980 to £2,740 million in 1985.[11]

The problem with these predictions is that no mention is made of offsetting tax losses and no mention is made of investment grants, etc., handed out to the companies. In 1973 the Deputy Chairman of the Inland Revenue agreed that "these tax losses are so large that they might, in fact, eliminate liability to tax for a significant number of years to come".[12] The 'fail-safe' provision written into the PRT legislation guarantees that PRT will not apply where the pre-Corporation Tax return on capital is less than 30 per cent, approximately 15 per cent post-tax.

In effect, previous Tory and Labour governments have carried out a bi-partisan policy on the exploitation and production of North Sea oil and gas which has been highly favourable to the US-dominated oil companies. Substantial balance of payment savings will nevertheless still accrue even after interest and principal capital borrowed abroad for oil development has been repaid, though whether sufficient savings will accrue to pay off the other massive foreign borrowings and offset the profits outflow from the US oil companies and still provide a surplus remains to be seen. It may well turn out that the government has indeed mortgaged the next 10 years' oil production to the international finance capitalists. The rate of return guaranteed by the tax régime is nevertheless more than favourable to the oil companies; there is no evidence that they are being so squeezed as to cut back exploration and exploitation.

4. OWNERSHIP OF ONSHORE OIL ENGINEERING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

The geographical location of onshore oil engineering and construction sites raises in very sharp relief the complete anarchy of capitalist enterprise; the spoliation of areas of natural beauty, the overcrowding in certain towns and cities, high rents and overburdened social services, the 'shanty' work camps, the probability of future 'ghost towns', the wasteful duplication of onshore facilities by local authorities, the encroachment on democratic rights with respect to public inquiries into planning requirements, etc. All these—and more—are the outcome of monopoly capitalism's drive for profit at local level, under acquiescent governments out for quick balance of payment returns.

These very important problems are compounded by the dominant position taken by mainly US companies in the onshore oil industries. For example, the principal drilling contractors are US companies as are almost all the companies involved in producing oil tools.

As already indicated the pace of development

[10] Agreements were reached with Gulf and Conoco in February 1976 and with Tricentrol in March 1976, *ibid.*, p. 1.

[11] *North Sea Oil Through Speculative Glasses*, D. I. Mackay, The Frazer of Allander Institute, 1975, pp. 10-11.

[12] *First Report of "Committee of Public Accounts" on North Sea Oil and Gas.*

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favoured US penetration and while the bulk of platform and rig construction for the British sector of the North Sea was undertaken abroad, even that which did take place in Britain was in the main in foreign, mainly US, hands. Of the 40 *drilling rigs* under construction for total North Sea use as of January 1975, only two were being built in Britain (at Marathon on the Clyde—a US firm). Of 28 *production* platforms under order at that time, 10 were being built in Britain, 11 elsewhere and seven were out for tender. Of the 10 being built in Britain, four were at yards either wholly or mainly owned by US companies, a further two by a French/British consortium and the remaining four by two British firms.

Overall, the proportion of offshore work for the North Sea obtained by companies operating in Britain has been slow to rise given that development has been underway for more than a decade and massive capital expenditure has already taken place. UK companies won some 52 per cent of 1975 offshore business in the UK sector of the North Sea compared with 40 per cent in 1974. The share capital goods supplied rose from 47 per cent in 1974 to 63 per cent in 1975 and in services supplied from 29 per cent to 41 per cent.[13] Table II indicates the value of orders placed and actual expenditure carried out in each of the last three years for total British sector North Sea offshore operations.

TABLE II[14]

	1973	*1974*	*1975*
Orders placed	£650m	£1,280m	£1,185m
Actual Expenditure	£360m	£830m	£1,500m

While the rising proportion of work accruing to UK companies indicates a better performance, it does little to remove the underlying position in which foreign monopoly capital dominates the onshore industry as well as the offshore industry, which will undoubtedly lead—as it has in the past in other industries—to major social problems and major problems of control of the economy, profit repatriation, etc.

5. OVERALL IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY

Other things being equal, the overall impact of the North Sea fuels on the British economy, both in terms of the balance of payments position and in terms of domestic employment and industrial structure, will be greater:

A. the more Britain becomes a net exporter of the fuels (which depends largely on the rate of exploitation) and in particular the greater the proportion of the net export which is refined and processed 'downstream' in Britain, i.e. the value of refined and processed fuels being very much greater than that of crude fuels (which will depend largely on the rate of expansion of the petro-chemical industry in Britain).

B. the less is the profit repatriation from Britain to other countries (which will depend largely on the proportion of the petroleum and petro-chemical industry which is British-owned and on government policies pursued) and

C. the more positive the overall impact of North Sea fuels and their developments on other industries, in particular the net export position of these latter.

Effects on Industry

In concrete terms there is presently no indication of either an expansion of the petro-chemical industry or the relocation of parts of it nearer the fuel fields. Given the forward planning times needed for these major projects, the lack of current expansion plans indicates that no major expansion can be expected over the next decade. Given that the chemical composition of North Sea oil does not meet the specifications for heavy industrial oils in the main (or for that matter, perhaps, the specifications of the present UK petro-chemical industry), then the bulk of it will be exported to the main vehicle oil markets of Western Europe and North America. Thus there seems little hope, given present trends, that a long-term employment impact of any magnitude can be expected. Rather any petro-chemical expansion is likely to take place in continental Western Europe or in North America!

On the engineering and construction industries side, while the government makes great play of the long-term nature of the skills being built up, again there is little evidence that a fundamental restructuring is taking place such that a major long-term employment impact can be expected. Mackay at Aberdeen, after considering the trends in exploration, production platforms and oil refining, concludes:

> "Nevertheless, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that at some time in the late 1970s employment will stop growing and will then subsequently decline."[15]

His estimate is that direct and indirect employment from offshore oil activities is approaching

[13] *Offshore Supplies Office, Press Notice,* July 1976.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] *Mackay, op. cit.,* p. 15.

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60,000 (there may be as little as 5,000 oil-related jobs outside Scotland) and that this represents only 2.9 per cent of the total Scottish labour force—hardly evidence of a major long-term employment impact.

The lack of export orders won by British oil engineering and construction companies is as good a guide as is available to the likely future world position of these industries in Britain. More serious, however, and a damning indictment of the 1964-70 Wilson government, is the plight of the steel industry, currently under attack by monopoly capitalism.

Between 1967 and the present, a whole industry of world-wide potential—advanced technology steel pipe-making—was gifted to foreign manufacturers, in particular the Japanese. British output accounted for only 7 per cent of North Sea pipe requirement in 1974 and 5 per cent in 1975. A similar position applies to the 'thick plate' side of the steel industry with as much as 50 per cent of such materials for the North Sea coming in as imports. For example, of the approximately 40,000 tons of steel required for the first two Forties fields platforms, the breakdown was as follows: BSC 42 per cent, Japan 18 per cent and Sweden, West Germany and France the remaining 40 per cent. Undoubtedly, Common Market membership has led to much of the weakness of British Steel in these major export areas.

The Underlying Strategy

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the underlying economic strategy of the ruling class—supported by both Tory and Labour governments with respect to North Sea fuels must be seen within the context of short-run balance of payments position and the political-economic perspective of membership of the Common Market. On the evidence to hand, while the balance of payments impact will be substantial, it may require an astronomical fuel offtake rate, thus reducing the life of the fields, and no evidence is available that a major restructuring of the domestic economy is foreseen. Rather the position seems to be that the balance of payments impact is intended to 'cover' the massive capital outflow in order to attempt to rebuild the British monopoly ruling class's dominant position in the capitalist world as the major Common Market member.

Whether the North Sea fuels will provide sufficient financial leeway to carry through this ruling-class strategy is open to some doubt when set against (for example) governmental international borrowing requirements estimated by the Godby-Cripps team at Cambridge at some £11,000 million by 1977, costing some £1,000 million in interest charges on the balance of payments. The US 'connection', via the penetration of onshore and offshore oil industries, may also want a say in how the fuels are utilised and to whose benefit!

6. NATIONALISATION AND AN INTEGRATED FUEL POLICY: THE ALTERNATIVE

It is not, nor can it ever be, our party's and the 'left's' aim to help the ruling class carry through the above strategy. It would be wrong, therefore, to approach the question from the point of view that since there is a major balance of payments problem, no matter how created, that we must offer a solution to this problem which includes using oil and gas as 'cover'. Rather the reverse: we must offer realistic and recognisable policies with respect to the utilisation of these fuels which go beyond, indeed show the falsehood of, the glamorous claims put forward by all and sundry on the far-off benefits of North Sea oil exports—because exports is really all they are talking about.

Our approach must be to relate the potential of industrial regeneration using oil and gas as feedstocks and the earnings from oil and gas as investment capital, to the whole question of the role of the present nationalised industries in such a way as to challenge the prevailing attack on steel, the holding back of coal expansion, the projected run-down of the railway network, etc. This must be set within a wider policy framework which cuts through the foreign strategy of British imperialism, which challenges Common Market membership and the enormous capital outflow. Only on this basis can we build an alternative economic programme which runs counter to that of British imperialism and allows us to rally support in the labour movement for a political challenge in the current economic and political crisis. Natonalisation of the North Sea fuels, within an integrated fuel policy linked to industrial regeneration particularly of the nationalised industries, must stand at the centre of our alternative economic programme.

The case for nationalisation is not therefore only or even primarily an economic one—it is also a political case. It cannot be seen simply as a question of whether or not the financial wherewithall can be found *in the present situation* to continue to develop the North Sea resources; rather the question should be whether in raising the demand within a wider economic perspective the *situation can be changed* such that the financial resources will then be forthcoming. It is not therefore simply a question of whether or not we can buy out the US monopolies and at the same time provide the development capital from domestic sources (although as will be argued below this is a possibility), but whether in raising the demand

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for nationalisation in the broadest and most positive context we set in motion forces which change the situation.

Looking back at the history of the nationalised coal industry, the position adopted by our party with respect to the role of coal as a primary fuel in the British economy has been particularly vindicated. Against the prevailing trend in the 60s—held by the Tories and the bulk of the social democrats—we argued that coal output should be maintained at mid-50s levels (240 million tons), that investment should be substantially increased, that some concentration of output should take place, but that coal as the major indigenous fuel at that time should provide the major source of energy. Today even the Coal Board are arguing for output expansion! In these circumstances and taking into account the strength of the gas industry and the weaknesses in the industries supplying the Central Electricity Generating Board (e.g. Babcox & Wilcox in the heavy generating industry), our arguments for a planned integrated fuel policy running for a number of years ahead is an attractive proposition for the workers in these industries, as it would be for the workers in the oil platform construction sites in Scotland.

TABLE III OUTPUT FORECASTS OF PETROLEUM-BASED ORGANIC CHEMICALS

(MILLION METRIC TONNES)

	1960	*1969*	*1975*	*1980*	*1985*
USA	10	24.5	45	65	90
W. Europe	2.3	15.5	35	60	100
Rest of world	0.7	11.0	25	40	60
Total	13.0	51.0	105	165	250

The Petro-chemical Industries

At a more general level the case for using oil, gas and coal as feed-stocks for a whole range of petro-chemical industries is also a realistic proposition. In terms of both employment and general consumption, North Sea fuels ensure the supply of raw material for one of the world's fastest-growing industries—the chemical industry. While it may be true that the current price of oil may slow down the expansion of this industry in world terms, this may be offset to the extent that other feed-stocks, e.g. coal, are developed, so that while the following figures were compiled prior to the recent oil crisis there is little danger that they vastly overestimate the future growth of the chemical industry.

Even if the estimated annual growth rate for West Europe which underlies the figures is reduced from 13 per cent to, for example, 8 per cent, production would still double by 1980. Plastics alone, which take over 40 per cent of total organic chemicals in their manufacture, would reach a world figure of 100 millions by 1980 as against 30 million tons in 1970. Other 'end products' are resins, solvents, detergents, fertilisers, pharmaceuticals, etc., and all are likely to be subject to similar growth rates. On figures such as these we can surely construct a realistic and recognisable case for industrial expansion in these fields—to provide long-term jobs and high earnings to workers—which runs directly counter to the present strategy.

Nationalisation of the oil and gas resources would lead on to a whole network of chemical monopolies. The private sector of British Petroleum and the 40 per cent of Shell owned by British shareholders could be nationalised to provide what the Labour Party have called a National Hydrocarbons Corporation, with a network of refineries, tanker fleets and distribution points.

Additionally, both Shell and BP have extensive interests in the chemical sector, where oil is the major basic feed-stock. ICI, the dominant chemical concern in Britain, has a share of the Mexican oil field and again, if nationalised, could, with BP's and Shell's chemical plants, become part of a state-owned chemical corporation inter-linked with the National Hydrocarbons Corporation.

Diversification

Chemical companies like ICI are taking steps to integrate backwards into the heavier end of the oil business, while the oil companies may in the current situation be forced to develop their 'downstream' petro-chemical activities. Diversification by the major oil companies includes the Shell Group's agreement to invest an initial $200 million in a joint scheme with Gulf Oil to produce high-temperature, gas-cooled nuclear reactors and Exxon's (Esso) £85 million research and development programme which will examine the conversion of coal into oil.

On the nuclear side, GEC, which owns 50 per cent of the National Nuclear Corporation, is an obvious candidate for nationalisation. As well as

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occupying a dominant place in the nuclear energy field, it is also a substantial supplier to the GPO.

In the coal industry the left's long-existing aim of nationalisation of the mining machinery suppliers and the coal distributors could also be undertaken.

The Case for Nationalisation

The carrying through of these nationalisation measures would mean that a number of the most profitable monopolies would be brought under state control, which would be a substantial step forward in exerting control over to the rest of monopolised industry. Such a struggle, by putting forward the case for such extensive nationalisation to the mass of the workers in each industry through the movement generally and within the specific unions in particular, could take the labour movement further into the anti-monopoly phase of the struggle for socialism.

The financial cost of such extensive nationalisation would not be much more than that envisaged under the Labour Party's "top 25 companies" scheme, if even that. The crucial point with respect to oil and gas is that sufficient development work has already been undertaken to provide fairly massive oil revenues even if the development work were to cease in the event of a nationalisation challenge. Essentially the oil companies—those at or near the production stage—are 'locked in', their bargaining position is weak and while they would resort to political control in an attempt to fend off nationalisation this is surely not a reason for the movement not to raise the demand! The simplest method of payment, short of no payment at all, is, of course, to offer the companies payment in oil from the fields themselves, at stipulated quantities and prices and for a final time period. (If this had been done with the old coal-owners, it would have removed many of the financial problems associated with the NCB and made financial manipulation by the monopolies of the coal industry much less easy.)

The question of nationalisation when set within our party's alternative economic strategy plays not only an economic role but also a political one. Alongside our demands for a prices freeze, import controls and the cessation of capital export, nationalisation of oil and gas not only allows us to make concrete proposals for industrial regeneration leading to full employment and long-term security of income, but also raises the politics of the anti-monopoly struggle in a sharp way which would allow the building of a mass movement in specific industries and in the labour movement at large.

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Discussion Contributions on:

The Strategy of Rank and Filism

Geoff Roberts

Introduction

On March 30, 1974, an organisation calling itself the 'National Rank and File Movement' (NRFM) held its founding conference in Birmingham with some 500 trade union delegates in attendance. In November of the same year a Second Conference was held. Despite public protestations to the contrary by its organisers, it is clear that the establishment of the NRFM did not in any way signify a deep-rooted, spontaneous movement on the part of grassroot trade unionists for such an organisation. In essence, the appearance of the NRFM on the British political scene was the product of a political assessment by the International Socialists (IS) that the time was ripe for the launching of a movement that forms the centre-piece of that organisation's strategy for winning socialism in Britain.

Similarly, the gradual and almost imperceptible metamorphosis of the NRFM into the 'Right to Work Campaign' (RWC) is to be explained in terms of a realisation on the part of IS's leadership that the launching of the NRFM had been somewhat premature and that the most tactically opportune means of building a firm basis for such an organisation was through the RWC. Or as Chris Harman explained to the 1976 IS Conference: "Our strategy is the building of the national framework of a National Rank and File Movement through the Right to Work Campaign."[1]

From the foregoing emerge two crucial points about the nature of the RWC and of its predecessor, the NRFM. Firstly, the democratic façade apart, the RWC is a 'Front' organisation in the classic mould, i.e. a means by which IS policies are transmitted to the working class in a guise more likely to win their acceptance. Secondly, and more importantly, the RWC is the embryonic embodiment of an entire political strategy for socialism. For IS the building of an independent national rank and file movement constitutes the strategic task to which all else (except the building of IS itself) is subordinated. In an article in *International Socialism* Ken Appleby makes this point in its sharpest form:

> "Given the British political situation, it is extremely unlikely that any party could achieve a revolutionary change in society without having previously built a National Rank and File Movement. We now have the task of creating the reality."[2]

It is this strategy and its theoretical bases that forms the main subject-matter of this article. The precise nature of the 'strategy of rank and filism' proposed by IS will, I hope, become clearer in what follows. For the present it is sufficient to note that its essence consists in the fostering of rank and file groupings and movements, under IS leadership, at every level throughout the labour movement with the ultimate objective of forging them into a national movement which, in the words of one contributor to *International Socialism*, will "untrammelled by a reformist bureaucracy . . . be capable of challenging capitalism itself".[3]

IS and the Trade Union Movement

The "model" of the Trade Union Movement which underpins the 'strategy of rank and filism' has been perfectly described as an "all-weather kit"[4] which is easy to grasp and into which the most complex of phenomena can be incorporated with the minimum of effort. Anyone at all familiar with *Socialist Worker*, the IS paper, will know that it is, of course, the 'Bureaucracy versus the Rank and File' model. According to this view the main divide in the trade unions is between, on the one hand, a "Trade Union Bureaucracy" (TUB) and, on the other, the mass of the rank and file. Consequently, the main battle in the movement is one of control by these opposing groups. The material basis for this dichotomy lies in the fact that the TUB constitutes "a special social group with interests of its own distinct from the mass of the working class".[5] These interests consist of "better pay, conditions and . . . job security

[1] *Socialist Worker* (June 5, 1976), p. 10.

[2] *International Socialism* 83 (November 1975), p. 15.

[3] *International Socialism* 76 (March 1975), p. 7.

[4] By Leeds Communist Party Students in their *The IS and the Student Movement*, 1973, p. 8.

[5] *Socialist Worker* Editorial (January 9, 1971, p. 2.

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than the rank and file militant".[6] Furthermore, this material divide is reinforced by the social and ideological isolation of the TUB from the rank and file consequential upon the differing life-style and environment, the enormous pressures towards conforming to capitalist values, and the bureaucratic location of the former.

The TUB, we are informed, continually vacillates between the rank and file from whom it derives its power and prestige and the employers, government and the state with whom its material privileges are inextricably bound. However, at "all decisive moments the union bureaucracy is bound to side with the state".[7] In particular, the role of the TUB is one of restraining the economic and political militancy of the trade union membership it supposedly represents since, above all, its privileged position within capitalism is dependent upon its ability to contain that militancy within certain limits and/or to channel rank and file energies in safe directions. At certain conjunctures sections of the TUB can be forced by the rank and file to adopt, temporarily, progressive stances, but, strategically, its role, we are told, is a fundamentally reactionary one. In this respect the so-called 'left' trade union leaders are no exceptions since what unites them with the Right is more fundamental than what divides them:

> "The difference between the two wings are differences in their power base and May Day oratorical style. Yet fundamentally they perform the same function and role: they are an estate within capitalism, locked into capitalist norms and objectives."[8]

The Concept of "the Trade Union Bureaucracy"

The logic of this analysis is inescapable. The key to advance lies in rank and file struggle against the bureaucracy. For revolutionaries the central strategic objective in the trade unions is the building of a structurally independent rank and file movement that will be capable of removing the main obstacle on the road to a militant trade union movement, the TUB. Of central import is the exposure of the so-called 'lefts' and their "lackeys"[9] in the Communist Party who play an especially insidious role in sowing dangerous illusions among the rank and file.

It is clear that the key concept in the schema sketched above is that of the TUB and that the 'strategy of rank and filism' hinges, more or less, on its validity. In endeavouring to subject this concept to critical scrutiny an immediate difficulty that is encountered is that nowhere, to my knowledge, in all the voluminous IS literature on this subject can there be found a precise definition of who actually belongs to the TUB. Whether it consists of just the 'top leaders', full-time officials, or leaders at every level of the trade union movement remains a mystery. Its meaning can be (and is) stretched or contracted as it suits. The only category of union leaders consistently excluded from the TUB are shop stewards or their equivalents—although even some of them evoke suspicion on the part of IS. For example, Tony Cliff, writing in 1970, darkly notes that "a most insidious trend appearing in recent years is the increase in the number of full-time convenors, shop representatives, deputy convenors, works committee members, etc., who spend an increasingly long period away from their increasingly nominal jobs".[10]

Absence of such a definition or even the criteria for constructing one must bring into question the validity of the concept of the TUB or, at the very least, impose severe limitations on its utility. Similarly, with regard to the question of the collective characterisation of those individuals who make up the TUB. The concepts of "caste", "estate", "stratum" and "social group" are used interchangeably by IS writers thereby negating any scientific value such concepts might have. IS literature is also inconsistent when it comes to specifying the relative weighting to be given to the various factors which are purported to determine the "treacherous" role of the TUB; some writers emphasising material privilege, others social pressures, and yet others bureaucratic imperatives.

Thus, what we are dealing with is far from a coherent and developed theory.[11] Theoretical incoherence is matched by ambiguity and inconsistency at the level of political practice. For example, IS emphatically denies that it aims to build an organisational alternative to the trade unions and yet we find statements such as that the NRFM will "untrammelled by a reformist bureaucracy . . . be capable of challenging capitalism itself". These points should be borne in mind when considering what follows.

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[6] *International Socialism* 48 (June/July 1971), p. 34.

[7] Tony Cliff quoted by Steve Jefferys in *International Socialism* 76, p. 9.

[8] *International Socialism* 53 (October/December 1972), p. 3.

[9] *International Socialism* 84 (December 1975), p. 22.

[10] N. Harris and J. Palmer (eds.), *World Crisis: Essays in Revolutionary Socialism*, Hutchinson & Co., 1971, p. 235.

[11] In the sketch above I have relied upon what appear to be the most authoritative statements of the IS position.

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Trade Unions in Capitalist Society

What determines the role played by trade union leaders? In the IS schema attention is focused upon that which differentiates trade union leaders from their members; namely, material privilege, social environment and institutional location. There can be no doubt that such factors as these do play a part, and an important one at that. In the hands of IS, however, their importance is inflated and distorted to an almost incredible degree. Absent is any real appreciation of the two sets of variables that should warrant our closest attention, i.e. the *structural* and *ideological* determinants of trade union activity. It is to a discussion of these that I now want to turn.

Trade unionism was born out of the struggles of the working class to collectively defend and improve its conditions of employment against the exigencies of capitalism. Arising out of opposition to capitalism trade unionism, paradoxically, belongs essentially to that same system since, as Gramsci argued, trade unions "organise workers, not as producers, but as wage-earners, that is as creations of the capitalist system of private property, as sellers of labour power",[12] i.e. trade union action is founded upon an acceptance of capitalist property relations. It is this which lies at the root of what many writers have identified as the inherently contradictory and ambivalent nature of trade unionism under capitalism. As Richard Hyman has put it:

> ". . . on the one hand a protest and defence against the economic and human deprivations imposed on workers by their role in capitalist industry; on the other a means of accommodation to the political economy of capitalist industry. This in turn reflects the contradictory pressures inherent in trade union organisation and collective bargaining activity: on the one hand the expression of the basic conflict of interest between employers and employees . . . on the other the development of a stable and compatible bargaining relationship. Hence the curious phenomenon of 'antagonistic co-operation' . . . the constant interpretation of conflictual and collaborative aspects of trade unionism."[13]

It is in the role of union leaders that the ambivalent and contradictory nature of trade unionism is most fully expressed. And this applies to *all* trade union leaders, not just full-time officials, and irrespective of the political positions of the individuals involved for, as Eric Hobsbawm has noted, "even the most revolutionary must fight the battles for improvement and reform according to the nature of the terrain, which is that of 'realistic' calculation in a capitalist economy and a capitalist state. That is to say they must compromise, make allies, and in general act as reformists. If he is to be effective in a stable capitalist economy, even the communist union leader must do this, whatever his private reservations and calculations."[14] In this light the frequent accusations emanating from the pages of *Socialist Worker* about 'sell-outs' and 'betrayals' directed at left trade union leaders must be received with some scepticism. For, as Tony Lane argues:

> "What 'selling out' most typically meant . . . was that opinions differed as to what was a 'reasonable' compromise. That labour leaders were ready to compromise rarely had anything to do with their political morality. Indeed, most frequently it was, more than anything else, a reflection of the dilemma that mutually embraced both leaders and followers."[15]

The Logic of the Situation

The dilemma is that because trade unionism is essentially about "the negotiation and renegotiation of order within the constraints set by a capitalist economy and a capitalist state",[16] it is subject to a certain *logic of situation*. In order to negotiate, stable bargaining relationships are necessary which, in turn, entail, for example, working relationships between management and union leaders which is itself the beginning of the process of separation between union leaders, especially officials, and members. Contradictions also arise between the 'union' and different sections of the membership, for at certain conjunctures orderly bargaining patterns may be in the interests of one (usually the union) and not the other.

The identification of the *structural* determinants of trade union behaviour patterns is crucial if superficial and sloganising solutions (*à la* IS) are to be avoided. For example, in relation to the question of the relative isolation of most union officials from the rank and file Tony Lane correctly argues that:

> "The fact to seize upon . . . was not the distancing, but the logic of the process that created it. As long as trade unionism was about remedying the present, so long was it inevitable that the

[12] Quoted in R. Hyman, *Industrial Relations: A Marxist Introduction*, Macmillan, 1975, p. 102.

[13] *Workers' Control and Revolutionary Theory* in the *Socialist Register 1974* (R. Miliband and J. Saville [eds.]), pp. 257-8.

[14] *Labouring Men*, Weidenfeld, 1968, p. 339.

[15] *The Union Makes Us Strong*, Arrow Books, 1974, p. 177.

[16] Hyman, *Industrial Relations*, p. 91.

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> union leader was abstracted from his roots, forced into the patterns and practices of secret diplomacy, the 'shabby compromises' that aroused the anger of the rank and file from time to time."[17]

This 'logic of situation' has many other ramifications including, for example, tendencies towards oligarchic forms of trade union organisation.[18] One, in particular, that needs to be highlighted is that the processes attendant upon the 'logic of situation' provide fertile ground for the exertion of pressure by external agencies, notably the state, on rank and file and union leader alike. The seduction by employers, government and state of union leaders is greatly facilitated by the distance that separates the latter from the rank and file.

What conclusions are we to draw from the above discussion? Firstly, that what defines trade union leaders as a group is *not*, as IS argues, that they have special interests of their own distinct from those of the working class, but their *function* which is in turn structurally determined. The factors spotlighted by IS, such as material privilege, are contingent rather than primary.[19] Secondly, what is problematical for revolutionaries is not the role of trade union leaders but the nature of trade unionism itself. Thirdly, that the main strategic task of revolutionaries cannot be the smashing of the so-called TUB, but the transformation of trade unionism as it exists at the moment under capitalism. This would involve both the development of trade unions into agencies of class struggle (broadly defined) with a crucial role to play in changing society *and* their development into institutions which, to refer back to Gramsci, would organise workers as producers as well as wage earners.

A Forward Strategy

In other words, what is required is a forward strategy of workers' control which may be defined as "a struggle by workers and their organisations to encroach upon the prerogative of management, and to cut back managerial authority in the enterprise, and the power of capital in the economy".[20] Such a strategy could, of course, only succeed in the context of an all-embracing strategy for socialism.[21] By the same token, however, it is doubtful that any such strategy could work in the absence of a perspective and policy of the transformation of trade unionism, whatever specific form that might take. For at the heart of socialist strategy is the object of bringing about a transformation of mass consciousness. Trade unionism as it is practised at present engenders at best only *corporate* consciousness, and more often than not only *sectional* consciousness. Furthermore, consciousness does not exist or develop in a vacuum but is expressed in and sustained by institutions. The development of sectional and corporate consciousness into socialist consciousness requires an accompanying development in their institutional basis, the trade unions.

To broaden the argument somewhat account must also be taken of Gramsci's view that in the societies of advanced capitalism ruling class power rests predominantly on the consent by the mass of people to its rule. Such consent is maintained and reproduced in a number of ways, including by the institutions of what he called *civil society*, i.e. churches, schools, political parties, cultural institutions, etc. As a consequence of this the revolutionary forces have to wage a hegemonic battle on the terrain of civil society in order to establish a consent for a new social order. Arguably, in striving to establish its own hegemony the working class must create new institutions and conquer and transform existing ones, for example the trade unions, so as to develop its own network of institutions to counter that of the ruling class.

Left Unity

Differing strategies give rise to differing con-

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[17] *Op. cit.*, p. 274.

[18] For fuller treatment of these and related themes consult, in addition to the works already cited, V. L. Allen, *The Sociology of Industrial Relations*, Longman, 1971; R. Blackburn and A. Cockburn (eds.), *The Incompatibles: Trade Militancy and the Consensus* (especially Perry Anderson's essay), Penguin, 1967; R. Hyman, *Industrial Conflict and the Political Economy* (in *Socialist Register 1973*).

[19] Whilst generally accepting that *some* trade union leaders are, relative to their members, materially privileged, we agree with Hyman that "the attractions should not be exaggerated: the hours of work are long, the pressures considerable, the pay (for junior officials at least) rarely much above the earnings of the higher-paid sections of the membership" (*Industrial Relations*, p. 78). Furthermore, relative material privilege is not confined to trade union officials for the privilege of some sections relative to others is a widespread feature of the working class as a whole.

[20] T. Topham and K. Coates, *Workers' Control*, in *Marxism Today*, January 1969, p. 24. See also their *The New Unionism*, Penguin, 1974. There are, of course, many difficulties in such a strategy, some of which are detailed in Bert Ramelson, *Workers' Control? Possibilities and Limitations*, *Marxism Today*, October 1968, and in Hyman's article in the *Socialist Register 1974*.

[21] The basis for such a strategy has already been laid in the Communist Party's *The British Road to Socialism*, at present being revised. In my opinion, a major lacuna in the current version is precisely a strategy of workers' control.

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cepts of Left Unity. In the case of IS the strategic objective of smashing the so-called TUB results in the notion of rank and file unity and struggle against official leaders, including so-called 'lefts'. This concept is as false as the strategic ideas that underpin it. Apart from the obfuscation of real problems and issues the focus on a largely mythical bureaucracy carries with it the enormous practical dangers of diverting the movement down blind-alleys and the isolation of revolutionaries from those forces in the trade unions with whom unity should be sought.

An alternative conception of the tasks and problems that revolutionaries face in the trade unions suggests a radically different idea of unity, one of *left political alliance*. If one accepts that the problem of change in the trade union movement is not primarily one of treacherous leadership but of political consciousness, then it follows that unity must be forged between those progressive political forces, whether they be rank and file members or trade union leaders, striving to give a left direction to the movement in opposition to the forces of class collaboration and industrial peace. Such is the perspective of the Communist Party which bases its work on the view that the main divide in the trade unions, and by extension the labour movement as a whole, is an ideological one between the Right and Left. A division which finds expression in the existence of distinct political trends within the movement.

Here we have arrived at the *ideological* determinants of trade unionism. Within the structural limits imposed by the nature of trade unionism as it has historically developed under capitalism different patterns of trade union behaviour coexist, which are particularly striking when it comes to the broader social goals of the trade union movement. The homogeneity of trade union leaders in terms of function is matched by considerable heterogeneity in terms of ideology which is itself reflected in the diversity of roles played by different sections of trade union leaders. Why are the Jones's and Scanlons so different from the Chapples? IS has no answer except to deny that there is any real difference and to brush aside the professed ideals of left trade union leaders as left rhetoric of no consequence except in so far as it provides a smokescreen for real intentions and actions.[22]

Given the above analysis the strategy of the Communist Party is one of strengthening and galvanising the left trends throughout the movement in order that the Right, which has for so long held a dominant position, might be decisively challenged. To this end genuine left alliances are sought within each union and at a national level. The organisational forms that such alliances adopt is a concrete question dependent on the prevalent conditions. The winning of union positions on the basis of mass support is integral to that strategy, as is, where necessary, the development of rank and file movements such as the Building Workers' Charter, Flashlight and, somewhat different in character, the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions. The left forces involved are by their very nature characterised by diversity and fluidity—a fact manifested in the sometimes contradictory role in the class struggle played by particular elements at particular times. On the one hand, they play a part in the struggle for a new economic strategy and, on the other, they accept the Social Contract. One example we could point to is the negative role being played by some sections of the left in relation to the present Labour Government's economic policy. But at core they constitute a healthy trend within the trade unions around which can develop a powerful movement for change in the unions.[23]

Party Building

Hitherto, we have been dealing with what might be described as the 'public face' of rank and filism, a rationale revolving around a notion of trade union bureaucracy. This stated purpose of rank and filism is indeed a very real purpose, but it is not the only. In the total IS strategic schema rank and filism fulfils two other crucial and interrelated functions. The first of these is that of *party building*. Like all the ultra-left organisations that sprang from the political tradition established by Leon Trotsky,[24] IS is afflicted by an extreme variety of political voluntarism, which has as its consequence the "collapse [of] all problems of revolutionary strategy and practice into the single

[22] For a discussion of how the concept of ideology tends to fare in the hands of IS theorists, see Dave Purdy's pamphlet *The Soviet Union: Socialist or State Capitalist?*

[23] For a fuller exposition of CP perspectives, consult Bert Pearce, *The Strategy of Socialist Revolution, Marxism Today*, January 1971; Dave Priscott, *The Communist Party and the Labour Party, Marxism Today*, January 1974; Jack Woddis, *Time to Change Course*, CP Booklet, March 1973. See also the forthcoming revised draft of *The British Road to Socialism* scheduled to be published in January 1977.

[24] This tradition is analysed in M. Johnstone, *Trotsky and World Revolution*, Young Communist League, 1976; G. Hodgeson, *Trotsky and Fatalistic Marxism*, Spokesman, 1976; K. Mavrakis, *On Trotskyism*, Routledge, 1976; N. Krasso, *Trotsky's Marxism, New Left Review* 44; G. Roberts, *The Politics of the IMG, Marxism Today*, February 1976.

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master problem of building the revolutionary party".[25]

The question of how to build the party is an open-ended one as evidenced by the numerous and competing strategems advocated by the equally numerous ultra-left groups and sects. IS's solution to the problem is the 'strategy of rank and filism', i.e. the establishment of *Front* organisations which function as a sort of half-way house for workers on the road to the revolutionary party. "What is on the agenda," stated Jimmy McCallum, the IS candidate in the Walsall North By-Election, in a recent interview, "is the possibility of convincing a whole number of militants—who . . . are not ready to join a revolutionary socialist organisation—that there is a possibility of joining a rank and file organisation that has an independence and authority in the trade union movement."[26]

To become effective recruiting milieus, however, that very purpose has to be denied and covered up by cynical backstage manipulation. Similarly, challenges from other ultra-leftists have to be fended off by whatever means necessary.[27] Finally, this other purpose requires that, whatever the stated objectives, efforts to win change in the established structures of the labour movement be strictly subordinate to that of building up the rank and file fronts. Hence, the *primary* objective of the much-vaunted Right to Work Campaign is not the winning of the trade union movement as a whole to a campaign on unemployment but "the building of the national framework of a National Rank and File Movement".

Socialist Consciousness

The second function of rank and filism in the IS schema relates to the question of how socialist consciousness develops. Lenin argued that since by itself the working class could only develop forms of trade union consciousness it was the role of the revolutionary party to inject socialist consciousness into working class struggles in order that the class could grasp the self-knowledge which is a precondition for its self-liberation. It is this concept which *prefigures* the totality of relationships between the Leninist Party and the Class. IS's concept of the party is based on a rejection of this position of Lenin's. Indeed, Duncan Hallas argues that the question as to whether socialist consciousness arises spontaneously within the working class or has to come from without is a "hoary red herring" which has "absolutely no relevance to modern conditions".[28]

By contrast, IS bases itself on what is, under the guise of creative Leninism, a latter-day variant of the spontaneist position which Lenin sought to combat.[29] According to IS, the working class *does* develop socialist consciousness spontaneously, only that development is *uneven* in character.[30] The primary function of the party is, therefore, not the development of socialist consciousness among the working class but the overcoming of unevenness in a spontaneously developing consciousness. Hence, Tony Cliff considers that the relation between party and class is analogous to the relationship between a shop steward and his mates or a strike committee and workers of strike, i.e. a companion in struggle.[31] Cliff concludes that:

> "The role of Marxists is to generalise the living, evolving experience of the class struggle, to give conscious expression to the instinctive drive of the working class to reorganise society on a socialist basis."[32]

The link with rank and filism is now transparent. If one accepts that the working class spontaneously (in struggle) develops socialist consciousness the fostering of working class self-activity

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25 Purdy, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

26 *Red Weekly*, October 21, 1976. Perhaps the most open statement of IS's instrumentalist approach to rank and filism is that by the one-time IS Industrial Organiser Andreas Nagliati: "If all those militants who were involved in getting support for the struggles against the Industrial Relations Act, for the freeing of the Pentonville Five and the Shrewsbury Three, and in solidarity with the miners, were revolutionary socialists who had broken completely with Labourism and Stalinism and were ready to follow the lead of IS, *then there would be no need for a rank and file movement*. IS by itself would be seen by all other trade unionists as an existing *national alternative to the TUC* and would be able to organise resistance to the various attacks on living standards and organisation. But, of course, things are not at all like that." (Indeed!!!) *International Socialism* 66 (February 1974), pp. 12-13. This passage also reveals the confusion in IS politics between the specific and autonomous roles of the party and mass organisations, which is not unconnected to, see below, the economistic content of those politics.

27 A recent and graphic example of this was the RWC march to the TUC. See the reports and discussion in *Red Weekly* of September 9, 16, 23, and 30, and October 7, 1976.

28 T. Cliff, D. Hallas, C. Harman, L. Trotsky, *Essays on Party and Class*, Pluto Press, n.d., p. 20.

29 What I am describing here is only a *tendency* on the part of IS which can in no way be described as spontaneism pure and simple.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

32 *Ibid.*

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becomes of transcendent importance. Rank and filism, in the IS view, constitutes the most effective vehicle for that self-activity. Thus, the familiar formula of more militancy plus the growth of IS suffices as a strategy to take the working class forward in a socialist direction.

A striking comparison can be made between Jack Woddis's booklet *Time to Change Course* and Tony Cliff's *The Crisis: Social Contract or Socialism*. The former contains an analysis of the crisis, an exposition of the socialist alternative, *and* a coherent strategy for revolution which attempts to come to terms with the real problems faced by the Left. Cliff's book, on the other hand, ignores the latter, while the socialist alternative, which consists, in Cliff's hands, of a combination of moralism and utopianism, is relegated to a few pages at the end. Neglect of the problems of strategy is paralleled by a scarcely-veiled contempt for theory. Significantly, the 'What We Stand For' column published in *Socialist Worker* every week contains no hint whatsoever of the fact that IS is a supposedly marxist organisation basing itself on marxist theory.

Economic Reductionism

The theoretical root of both the party-building and spontaneist components of IS strategy is *economic reductionism*, which Dave Purdy has defined as "interpreting political and ideological events and processes as pure reflections whose only reality is that of signs faithfully registering the underlying movements of the economy, like a seismograph recording earth tremors".[33] One notable expression of economic reductionism at the level of political analysis and practice concerns the question of reformism—that bogy-man of the ultra-left. IS is, of course, fully aware of the problem of reformism. Both its importance and breadth of presence in the labour movement is recognised. IS fails, however, to understand the *nature*, *role* and *deep-rooted* character of that ideology. Thus, Tony Cliff could write in *mid-1969* that: "The old forest of reformism is withering away. The trees are without leaves, the trunks are dying."[34]

The so-called 'decline of reformism' has been a consistent theme of IS literature ever since.[35] We are told that the illusions workers have in Labour are purely 'residual'[36] in nature. Further that during the postwar period "the vote cast for Labour became increasingly a reflex action, albeit a class one, rather than a statement or gesture of faith".[37] Repetitive assertions of that character cannot dispel the grim truth that there has been no significant decline or break-up of reformism in the postwar period, including recent years which have seen massive struggles unparalleled since the 1920s. The evidence adduced in support of the IS thesis is admissible only on the basis of a misconception of reformism which is IS's very own. This misconception has its basis in a definition of reformism which is simplicity itself. Reformism, according to IS theorists, is a belief, primarily economic in content, in the possibility of reforms. Such a belief is expressed in the form of working class support for the Labour Party. The end of the postwar boom marked the beginning of the end of the economic conditions in which reformism could flourish, i.e. conditions in which reforms were possible. The 'decline of reformism' is homologous (clunk-click) to the decline in its objective basis.

Labour's organisational and electoral decline, it is contended, reflect the continuing decay of social-democratic ideas. Facts which contradict IS's reductionist logic are either ignored or twisted beyond all recognition.

An instructive example of the latter was the treatment given in *International Socialism* to the results of the AUEW elections. Right-wing victories in a union whose membership can generally be counted among the most advanced in the working class would appear to contradict the IS thesis or at least call them into question. To the simple-minded the election results would appear to represent the continued grip of reformism on even an advanced section of the class. Not so for IS, who argued that "it is an inescapable fact that the failure of the 'Broad Left' to bring home the bacon in simple economic terms lies at the root of the right-wing successes".[38] But why should right-wingers be chosen to replace the left? Could it have anything to do with the existence of reformist consciousness among AUEW members? This point is of more than academic significance since an incorrect analysis of the causes of renewed right-wing victories cannot but lead to incorrect tactics in the battle to reverse them; such is the case with IS policy which, in essence, consists of "more militancy". Whereas in fact the problem of the left in the AUEW is essentially

[33] *Op. cit.*, p. 41.

[34] *International Socialism* 36 (April-May 1969), p. 19.

[35] That is until quite recently. See, for example, the report on the 1975 IS conference published in *Socialist Worker* (March 15, 1975) and Ian Birchall's history of IS in *International Socialism* 76 and 77 (March/April 1975).

[36] *International Socialism* 67 (March 1974), p. 7.

[37] *International Socialism* 53 (October/December 1972), p. 1.

[38] *International Socialism* 84 (December 1975), p. 4.

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political and as such demands a political solution. The more militancy formula can only result in the isolation of the left and give further sustenance to the right-wing and their allies in the media.

IS and the Labour Party

The main problem with IS's analysis of reformism lies in their concept of it, which focuses on just one aspect, and a contingent one at that. At the heart of reformist ideology is an acceptance of the capitalist system, an acceptance which is rooted in a matrix of beliefs that are social, political and cultural, as well as economic in content. Moreover, reformism does not exist in a vacuum but is expressed through and sustained by a plethora of institutions. Neither does reformism exist in an ideological vacuum. Reformism is only one component of the totality of bourgeois hegemony. A strategy for defeating reformism in the labour movement can only be successful on condition that it forms an integral part of a general counter-hegemonic strategy in society at large. Hence, there is no reason to expect that the end of the possibilities for reform will herald a decline in reformism.

What of the arguments concerning the decline of the Labour Party? The Labour Party is composed of many different trends and tendencies ranging from the out-and-out class collaborationist to the revolutionary. Its organisational and electoral basis is especially diverse in character. Nevertheless, it is the case that the Labour Party at present is the most important expression of reformism. However, it is not the only one. The lower Labour votes in the last two general elections signified not the decline of reformism but a partial shift, in electoral terms, of its mode of expression. What IS omits from its analysis of election statistics is that Labour's lost votes went, in the main, to the Liberals and Nationalists. Hardly a sign of the shedding of reformist illusions.

"Workerism"

The final aspect of IS politics I want to deal with is that of *workerism*—the natural accompaniment of the rank and filism, spontaneism and economic reductionism detailed above. The essence of workerism is the exaltation of all that is proletarian in *form* combined with an acute overemphasis on the work-place as the site of proletarian struggle.[39] The latter is reflected in the pages of *Socialist Worker* which are devoted overwhelmingly to the industrial struggle of the working class (itself narrowly defined). The worker as consumer, tenant, man, woman, cultural being figures in *Socialist Worker* only in a peripheral and strained manner. Other groups and strata, e.g. students and women, hardly get a mention and when they do their struggles are generally presented in purely economistic terms.

The other aspect of workerism is less tangible and consequently harder to pin down. One concrete manifestation of it is, however, evidenced in IS's fanatical concern with the social composition of its membership. This is not to deny the legitimacy of efforts to ensure that the organisation's social composition mirrors that of the working class and allied strata as a whole, nor that some sections have more strategic importance than others. In the case of IS, however, the primary motivation is otherwise. For IS the fight to transform the social composition of its membership is, above all, a fight to *proletarianise* its political practice. The nature of a revolutionary organisation's practice is defined in terms of, to put it baldly, the number of workers in its ranks. Hence, Duncan Hallas's argument that:

> "The main problem for revolutionaries in Britain . . . is that they have existed outside or on the edges of the actual working-class movement and this can only be changed . . . on the basis of recruiting workers . . . so as to transform both the social composition and the *outlook and attitudes of the revolutionaries.*"[40]

The point is, of course, that an organisation's political practice is determined not primarily by its social composition but by its programme. We need only to consider our own 'working class' Labour Party or the (at times) petty-bourgeois

[39] "We see a revolutionary party being composed essentially of units based in work-places linked together by a district or area leadership, which itself is composed to a considerable degree of workers who occupy positions of influence in their work-places." *International Socialism* 84 (December 1975), p. 27.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

MARXISM TODAY—JANUARY 1977

The January issue will contain amongst other articles:

John Gollan

REPLY TO DISCUSSION ON SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY

John Hoffman and Richard Gunn

DEBATE ON THE DIALECTICS OF NATURE

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Problems in Our Party

This was apt in 1939 and equally so today. John, through Stalin, is helping to explain some negative developments in our party, including the news that the recent national chairman of the party has deserted us. If Tocher were alone it might not be important. In fact, he follows in the last six months two ex-members of the Political Committee, one of them at the time still a member of the Executive Committee, Cyril Morton and Jimmy Reid. A few months earlier Bernard Panter went, too. That makes four ex-party EC members from one industry.

They followed other ex-EC members like Dave Bowman, Agnes McClean, etc. These reflect serious political problems which the leadership consistently refuses to acknowledge. At EC meetings and congresses, including those where Tocher presided, we were assured of the growing movement and support for our policy. Small wonder the Executive prefers to launch a discussion on the weaknesses of the CPSU alone rather than include our own problems.

Those who believe that the weaknesses of the CPSU are mainly if not entirely responsible for our problems, and yet at the same time virtually ignore that we have any, are guilty of something as old as the working-class movement—opportunism. It doesn't pay off in the long run. Sometimes it doesn't in the immediate and certainly isn't doing so in Britain.

Capitalism is in the greatest crisis it has known for nearly 50 years. Yet support for the right-wing policies of blaming the workers' wages for the inevitable crises of capitalism measured in TU votes is the highest since before our party existed.

How are we faring in this situation? The circulation of our paper is less than half prewar. Since the disastrous decision to change the name of our paper under the illusion that getting rid of the title *Daily Worker* would lead to the biggest advance in its history, the weekend extras have dropped by over half and are now just around 6,000.

The YCL has lost nearly three-quarters of its members in recent years and reached a position where an average of about only one YCL member paid dues in each Parliamentary constituency. The considerable and rapid fall in our votes is very serious and the recent 28 gained in a ward in Clydebank is no comfort. I won't dwell on the decline of the factory branches, of members paying dues, *Challenge* circulation and a host of other problems.

Dictatorship of the Proletariat

It would have been very useful if the EC had opened a discussion on these questions in preparation for the coming discussion on the *British Road*. Instead, we shall be told, no doubt, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is outdated, or that Lenin only meant it for a limited situation and Marx didn't really go along with it at all.

Marx and Lenin, fortunately, can still speak for themselves. Lenin wrote in *The Disarmament Slogan 1916*: "But whoever expects that socialism would be achieved without a social revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat is not a socialist. Dictatorship is state power based directly on violence. And in the 20th century—as in the age of civilisation generally—violence means neither a fist nor a club but troops." Marx was equally clear in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, section 4: "Between capitalist and communistic society lies a period of the revolutionary transformation of one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat."

Even John was saying in 1965: "These forty-four years of Soviet experience have proved both the essential need and historically transient character of the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Dimitrov and Stalin

John's references to Dimitrov could confuse rather than clarify. In fact, Dimitrov's actions and his own words at the time help an understanding of the development of the cult of the individual and how it came that great leaders like Dimitrov went along with it.

The implication of John's reference to Dimitrov is that the popular front policies of the Seventh World Congress may in some way have been carried without necessarily having Stalin's support. John knows Dimitrov's position, but "it is impossible to say where Stalin stood at the outset of the discussion". Dimitrov was an outstanding and heroic communist leader and the spokesman of the ECCI at the Seventh Congress. His report was brilliant, but to suggest that such a change was made without Stalin's support is to deny the latter's domination. Such a suggestion would support the theory that Stalin was responsible for the negative and that Dimitrov and some Western European leaders for the positive. However comforting that might be, there is no evidence to support it at all.

Could Dimitrov have possibly achieved the position of General Secretary of the Comintern and maintained it for a decade without Stalin's agreement? The historical fact is that he worked with Stalin and they supported each other.

Surely even John wouldn't argue that Dimitrov didn't know what was going on in the Soviet Union. Dimitrov was neither blind nor a coward.

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He knew and, like some others, went along with it because of the world situation, the situation in the Soviet Union and the knife-edge on which the future of all humanity was balanced.

Attitude to the Soviet Union

That is why he wrote, after the Seventh World Congress, in the *Communist International* magazine: "In the present international situation there is and there can be no truer criterion to establish who is a friend and who is an enemy of the cause of the working class and socialism, who is an adherent and who is an opponent of democracy and peace, than the attitude towards the Soviet Union."

Why nowhere, in 20,000-odd words, is there an estimate of the responsibility we and other communist parties have for allowing the CPSU to shoulder such a huge part of the burden of the world's struggle and so help create the circumstances which lead to the development of the cult of personality?

Let this discussion be the prelude to a much broader one on the situation in the world, including the CPSU and ourselves as a basis for a fresh new and united assault on capitalism in crisis.

Alan Hunt

What is Stalinism?

This question lies at the very heart of the discussion initiated by John Gollan's article. Yet he does not use the word Stalinism anywhere. I want to argue that it is necessary to make use of the term Stalinism, because it allows us to distinguish between the actions and views of Joseph Stalin on the one hand, and a generalised political position which has had a deep and persistent influence on the whole international communist movement.

The Term 'Stalinism'

If we are going to use a term such as 'Stalinism' it is important that we do not use it loosely or as a term of abuse. I want to discuss some different ways in which the word is used and to suggest they are not adequate. I will not claim to provide any finished answer to the question I have posed, but I hope that I will be able to make some suggestion. If, as I believe, a major task which confronts the communist movement is to expunge the legacy of Stalinism, then to grapple with the nature of Stalinism is a pressing practical as well as theoretical issue.

The first and most restrictive view of Stalinism is that which identifies it simply with certain specific practices associated with the name of Stalin.[1] This view is encapsulated in the term 'the cult of the individual'. This approach is unacceptable because it implies that with the death of Stalin and the removal of some of his closest associates the problem is overcome.

Identification with Consequences

A second view which is implicitly taken by John Gollan himself is much less restrictive, but it also has weaknesses. Stalinism is identified essentially by its *consequences*. The purges, the repressions, the executions, the suppression of democratic political life and the violation of Soviet legality are its hallmarks. This horrific catalogue is quite correctly linked by John Gollan and other comrades to a number of 'incorrect policies' pursued during the Stalin period and with some unacceptable theoretical positions used to justify these policies.

I agree with the criticisms of these policies and theories. However, I want to suggest that to identify a political phenomenon by its consequences does not get to the heart of the phenomenon itself. If Stalinism is equated with purges, torture and executions, then it can be viewed as an 'episode' which is largely concluded and is therefore a matter of historical concern alone. It is my contention that Stalinism has had, and continues to have, a profound effect on the international communist movement. Although Stalin is dead, Stalinism lives on. It has its continuing impact on the theory, organisation and practice of the communist movement. While many important advances have occurred since 1956, we cannot assume that the victory over Stalinism is complete.

A Definition of Stalinism

Stalinism, I want to argue, is a general and persistent deformation or degeneration of Marxism.

The consequences of this way of presenting the question should be made clear. Stalinism seen in this way is therefore *not* a temporary phenomenon of a particular period of Soviet history, nor is it something which simply has 'legacies' which have persisted despite the passing of their author. Stalinism affected the life, the theory and the practice of every Communist Party.

[1] See for example, John Tarver (*MTD*, July 1976).

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Stalinism is a body, a system of policies, practices that form a whole. It cannot be regarded as having disappeared because its most direct and obvious manifestations have gone.

To identify the whole, the totality of Stalinism requires two things. First, the historical context in which it emerged must be identified, and, second, its central features must be examined.

The historical context of Stalinism goes beyond the particular circumstances of the Soviet Union after the death of Lenin. Rather it is to be found in the general character of the epoch that followed the 1914-18 War and the October Revolution. Its main features were the failure of the revolutionary movement in Western Europe, the relative stabilisation and recovery of capitalism and the isolation of the young Soviet Union.

These historical conditions determined the characteristics of the strategy of the communist movement, embodied in the Third International. The setback of the revolutionary movement in the West resulted in the centre of the communist movement being focused upon the Soviet Union. The movement became synonymous with the interests of the Soviet state. This had a dual aspect; on the one hand, it led to an internationalist solidarity with the young Soviet republic, but, on the other hand, a tendency emerged, which became more and more marked, to define the strategy of the whole communist movement by reference to the experience of the Soviet Union. Stalinism consisted of the adaptation of Marxism to this historical experience. Marxism became increasingly subordinate to the particular interests of the Soviet state. Perhaps one of the most important examples of this process was the sudden change imposed upon the political line of the communist movement as a consequence of the signing of the Soviet-German pact of 1939.

Marxism Adapted to Interests of Soviet State

Stalinism was the political and theoretical expression of the conditions under which the first socialist state emerged. It was extended to apply to the whole of the international revolutionary movement. It embodied, at the level of strategy and theory, the particular experiences and circumstances of the Russian Revolution, and transformed them into universal laws for the movement on a world scale.

Central to Stalinism is the elevation of 'the party' such that it becomes the substitute for the class and the mass movement. Its source was the decimation and exhaustion of the Russian working class. Its consequence was the universal application of 'commandism', the idea of the party directing and leading from above. This expresses itself in what Mark Harrison (*MTD*, June 1976) correctly identifies as the instrumentalism of Stalinism, the use and manipulation of the masses.

Such an elevation of the party—the breaking of its organic relations with the working class—lies at the root of Stalinism. The more 'the party' is elevated, the more crucial becomes the internal politics of the party. The class struggle comes to be seen as occurring mainly *within* the party. Here it is interesting to note certain important parallels between Stalinism and Maoism. This view is closely associated with the theory that class struggle intensifies under socialism. Attention becomes focused on the search for heretics within the party (e.g. trotskyists, rightists, capitalist-roaders, etc.). The result is an assault on internal party democracy, and the emergence of the theory of the 'monolithic party', which resulted in the destruction of the active internal democracy within the Bolshevik Party which had existed, even under the most difficult circumstances, during Lenin's lifetime.

Resulting from this elevation of the party is a 'voluntarist' approach to political practice. By voluntarism I mean a view which sees the party (and not the working class) as the main agent of history; revolution becomes an act of will of the party, and not the historical action of the working class and its allies. The party is presented as being able, almost irrespective of external conditions, to impose its will upon the masses and the historical process. Such was the approach of the Soviet Party to the forced collectivisation of Russian agriculture; no matter what the social and political consequences it was imposed because 'the party had decided'. The 'leading role of the party' becomes a matter of direction, and finally of compulsion; it ceases to be something which is won through commitment and allegiance. Sectarianism is the result of such an approach. All opinions not compatible with the prevailing 'line' of the party are not merely incorrect, but are hostile. Popular movements are to be brought under the 'control' of the party, which must impose the 'correct line'.

Dogmatism in the Field of Theory

The exclusive concern with the correct line leads to dogmatism in the field of theory. The particular form of dogmatism that characterises Stalinism finds expression in an interpretation of Marxism as a system of 'universal laws'. All processes, in society and in nature, are presented as governed by 'laws'; once discovered and learnt these laws can be applied to all situations. This tendency to reduce Marxism to a pre-given set of 'laws' came close to destroying the most creative aspect of Marxism. Marxism provides the method and the theory with which the complexity of the social world can be analysed and understood, and

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the appropriate political strategy determined. Once it is decided in advance, for example, that 'the final crisis of capitalism' is under way, then the possibility of objective and constructive analysis is rendered impossible.

One of the most important characteristics of Stalinism is that it advances an economic determinist interpretation of Marxism; economic forces are seen as exercising an exclusive and direct determination over all social processes. The operation of 'iron laws' led Stalinist theory to present capitalism as moving towards an inevitable internal collapse. It produced a 'theory of the crash' in which the 'final crisis of capitalism' had either arrived or was always just around the corner. The result of this theory was that it impeded the communist movement from coming to grips with the unexpected recovery and stabilisation of capitalism after both world wars. It led to the sectarianism of the 'Third Period' in which social democracy, or 'social fascism', became the main enemy.

The 'theory of the crash' and the voluntarism discussed earlier go hand in hand. The political consequence was that the party had to prepare itself to seize the initiative as the capitalist system undergoes its internal crisis. In the meantime, the party must guard its purity for the decisive struggle ahead. One of the ironies of history is that both Stalinism and Trotskyism share this combination of economic fatalism and political voluntarism.

Stalinism contains a very basic contradiction which renders it a very inconsistent political position. On the one hand it is determinist (everything is seen as the result of economic forces), and on the other it advances voluntarism (the party, if determined, can achieve any goal). These two positions are inconsistent; yet Stalinism makes use of both types of analysis. One of the results is that by switching between them it was possible to justify the often rapid changes in policy that were a feature of the Stalin period. Marxism was put to service to justify changes in policy, and it became used in this task mechanically so that it was increasingly dogmatic.

Political Lessons

I hope I have been able to identify some of the most general features of Stalinism as a political and theoretical position. Not only is it a distortion of Marxism, but it is also inconsistent and dogmatic; in other words, it is simply a bad and dangerous political position. I want finally to attempt to draw some political lessons.

Stalinism was the dominant influence on the communist movement for at least three decades. While the actions of Stalin came to an end with his death, it would be naïve to assume that Stalinism died with him. I believe that our Soviet comrades are wrong when they argue that the errors revealed at the 20th Congress have now been eradicated and that there is no need to reopen the discussion. The removal of the most excessive and visible aspects, 'the cult of the personality', does not confront the more fundamental and deep-seated features of Stalinism.

If Stalinism was the dominant influence it follows that it will have had its effects on almost all aspects of the theory, organisation and practice of the communist parties. I agree with Pat Sloan[2] that the version of democratic centralism we have inherited owes more to Stalin's centralism than it does to Lenin's democratic centralism.

In the present period a tremendous renewal of Marxist politics and theory is taking place in important sections of the communist movement. One important feature of that process must be the conscious effort to identify and overcome the legacy of Stalinism.

[2] *Marxism Today*, March 1976.

Fergus Nicholson

John Gollan hangs his 20,000 words on the occurrence of the 20th anniversary of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He warns us that "the media and the apologists of capitalism will use the occasion to stir up the anti-Soviet campaign in the period of detente".

Background of the Discussion

There is nothing so magical about 20th anniversaries as to compel a major discussion throughout the communist movement. Other things happened in 1956. Equally we might say that John Gollan's article marks the 10th anniversary of the launching of a discussion throughout the Communist Party on the question: "Should our newspaper abandon the name *Daily Worker*?"

In truth, if communists are taking time now for this discussion, when the bankruptcy of the crisis-ridden capitalist system cries out for our leadership, it is because life-and-death issues of the future direction of the international working-class movement are involved.

This discussion is in substance not unconnected with the Italian Communist Party's policy of 'historic compromise' based on their pessimistic

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and negative estimate of the prospects for socialism in Italy. It is not unconnected with the attacks by the leaders of the Spanish Communist Party on the Portuguese Communist Party at critical moments in Portugal's national democratic revolution. More generally, it is connected with the decision of the French Communist Party to drop the term 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' from their rules and to decide at their next Congress what words to adopt in its place, and of the Japanese Communist Party to drop the words 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' and even 'Marxism-Leninism'. Specifically this debate is preliminary to the discussion of the new, effectively a fourth, version of *The British Road to Socialism*.

Serious divergences of perspective are appearing among Communist parties in the monopoly capitalist sector. Speaking about his article at a public meeting in Glasgow, John Gollan connected this debate with the split in the international socialist movement in 1914 and spoke of possibilities of building a bridge to social democracy. We need, however, to consider: what is to be the nature and direction of the traffic on that bridge?

A Bridge to Social-Democracy?

The Editor of *The Times*, on February 10 of this year, before the Italian elections, reviewed the recent behaviour of West Europe's communists. He noted that John Gollan had "subjected the whole Soviet system to a severe critique in the January issue of *Marxism Today*". But his greatest concern was for the Italian communists and their projected historic compromise or coalition with the Christian Democrats. He wrote:

> "Yet these alliances and guarantees in themselves involve a further danger, which is that the Communist Parties may render themselves powerless to change anything at all, and thus deprive their participation in government of the positive value which many Communists and non-Communists assign to it. In Italy, for instance, one can imagine a Christian-Democrat-Communist coalition proving no less corrupt and impotent than the various other coalitions that have already been tried. If the Italian Communists can convince the world—as they almost have—that their acceptance of the democratic rules of the game is genuine, it might be better to give them a spell of office at the head of a left-wing alliance, and so give the Christian Democrats the period of opposition they so badly need, rather than submerge the one Italian party which still has some identity of its own and some moral credibility into the same amorphous morass of non-government as all the others."

In other words, *The Times* wants to cast Berlinguer in the Attlee-Wilson role and is afraid that he will only be an unsatisfactory Ramsay Macdonald.

A bridge to social democracy!

Of course, the Italian communists, the French communists and other West European communists may yet disappoint the Editor of *The Times*. What is clear is that he and his class are considering how the Communist Parties may be tamed and assimilated, where they are big enough to matter, into the bourgeois democratic circus.

Kautsky Yesterday and Today

In just the same way at the beginning of this century our capitalist class agonised over the dangerous, but successful, tactic of training the Labour Party to govern capitalism.

The Social-Democratic movement which failed the test of internationalism in 1914 was in name and history Marxist. Why did it fail? Lenin's explanation was that the upper sections of the working class, and through them the labour movement, were corrupted, were emasculated by concessions which were possible for monopoly capitalist powers at home because of the enormous profits made abroad.

So today if we list the countries in which the traditional revisionist parties, social-democratic parties, often form governments, and send Prime Ministers to meetings of the Socialist International, we find that in the main they are among the more monopolistic capitalist countries.

Similarly if we list the countries in which *The Times*' editor and his friends have hopes for emasculated communist parties, the social roots, even the geographical distribution, are very similar, with the addition of Japan—where monopoly capitalism has developed more recently. If there is a difference it is that with a growing socialist world and a pessimistic decaying capitalist world, there is less scope for reformist gradualist illusions and more recourse to the desperation of ultra-leftism.

If anyone believes that there is anything new in the ideas that are being widely, even authoritatively, recommended to Western European communists, can I beg him or her to read Kautsky's *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (University of Michigan Press), in which Kautsky attacks Lenin's *State and Revolution* and the course of Soviet revolutionary government generally, and Lenin's reply, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*.

Kautsky attacked Marx's ideas but attributed them to Lenin. The Kautskys of today attack Marx, Engels and Lenin, but ascribe the ideas under attack to Stalin. Otherwise our modern Kautskys differ only in writing less well, less clearly, even less persuasively.

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The main ideas of Marxism-Leninism which are under attack today are the Dicatorship of the Proletariat, Internationalism, the Vanguard Party and Democratic Centralism. If these are not the main points on which the revolutionary communist parties were distinguished from the reformist and revisionist social democratic parties, what are?

Abandon these propositions and you need no bridge to social democracy; you are already over on the other bank, a social democrat and not a communist; you don't need to change the Communist Party, only to leave it.

Sectarianism

In our party the great problem is still sectarianism represented by branches whose self-consuming internal life is like that condemned in the 1922 Pollitt-Dutt-Inkpin report (q.v.) on party organisation except that what was then described as a typically bad branch would today be hailed as a model.

Sectarianism is expressed in words by the replacement of the *vanguard* or leading role of the party by constant urging of the *independent* role of the party; in deeds by restriction of party discipline to the independent work of the party, while in the mass movement, communist is allowed to fight communist.

If we fail or decline to function as a vanguard, then we can only hurry along behind the leadership the working class has, in the direction of reformism and gradualism.

It is sectarianism when we act at election times as though the elections were mainly about communist candidates; it is sectarianism when our Congress agendas are full of internal organisational exhortation reissuable from congress to congress with amended figures; it is sectarianism when we can toil for months to produce party demonstrations numbered in hundreds about every issue at once (i.e. about ourselves) while we sometimes hardly lift a finger for major demonstrations numbered in thousands and tens of thousands.

Cure Worse than the Complaint

Some people, recognising this sickness of sectarianism, propose a cure that is worse than the complaint. They want us to model ourselves on the great Italian Communist Party. But whatever one thinks of that party's plan for entering the arena of government, it is surely obvious that there is no way to graft their solution on to our situation in Britain. The attempt would be more likely to leave us with a travesty of a Communist Party like the rump Australian Communist Party.

They tend to understand the left as us-plus-the-trotskyites. They tend to embrace every trendy petit-bourgeois radical cause (at least in words and while it remains fashionable); black power, women's lib/radical feminism, youth culture, gay lib, devolution, community politics, environmental protection, workers' control, electoral reform, participation, squatters, claimants; all these, with a great enthusiasm for democracy capitalist style, and none for socialism where it exists.

This cure is worse than the complaint.

The Party that is Needed

What our working class needs is a party which effectively provides class-conscious leadership throughout the labour movement, as Marx and Engels advised in the *Communist Manifesto*:

> "The Communists are distinguished from the other working class parties by this only
>
> (1) in the national struggles of the working class of the different countries they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire working class independently of all nationality
>
> (2) in the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the capitalists has to pass through they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole."

Capitalism in general crisis has less capacity to buy off sections of the working class. An ever larger part of its strategy has therefore to be the fostering of division within the working class and among working people generally. Even communists are not immune from the sectional outlook imposed by capitalism, and as individuals would spontaneously gravitate to the pursuit of sectional interests. It requires a disciplined Communist Party to ensure that every member puts first the interests of the whole working class. We need democratic centralism, not to protect party leaderships from criticism or removal, but to ensure that there are people acting throughout the working-class movement under the authority of the party in pursuit of a single strategy to overcome sectional and other barriers to the formation of a united, class-conscious and therefore revolutionary working class.

To be such a party we must follow Lenin's prescription in *What Is To Be Done* and represented by Clause 15 in our rules, that party members *work* in their party organisation.

To be such a party, we must translate into practise Lenin's advice against allowing ourselves to be excluded from the Labour Party, whose political limitations reflect not primarily renegade leaders but the present state of consciousness of the working class itself.

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Dictatorship of the Proletariat

The burden of John Gollan's article is an attack on the record of proletarian dictatorship. What is the dictatorship of the proletariat which Marx regarded as his main contribution to socialist theory?

First, it is political power in the hands of the working class.

Second, it means that the working class will no more readily relinquish power to the exploiters than any exploiting class in history has willingly given up its power.

Third, it is the use of political power by the working class to create the material and moral basis for Communism.

The Gollan view of socialism deserves careful examination. Despite the formal recognition of antagonistic forces, the underlying assumption is that when you take state power (or is it governmental office?) the country is a blank sheet of paper on which you write the new carefree socialist society. Any blots, any crossings-out, any words you don't like must be the result of errors or crimes by the Communist leadership.

The truth is the opposite.

Working-class power inherits the human and economic mess which made revolution possible in the first place.

After the immediate revolutionary crisis you have to fight the force of habit at the disposal of regrouped capitalist forces at home and abroad.

Socialism will not be built in Britain by the new socialist man. The new socialist man will be built by, and out of the wreckage of, capitalist man, in the process of building socialism. Our difficulties, our mistakes, our crimes in building socialism, are all in the future.

Marian Sling

In the discussion on socialist democracy initiated by John Gollan's article, we are concerned not only with analysing the past, important as this is, but primarily with trying to formulate more clearly the type of socialist society we envisage for Britain. While basing ourselves, as we do in the *British Road*, on the traditions of our own working-class movement and applying Marxist theory to the specific conditions of Britain, we also learn from the positive and negative experience of other countries. So far, however, there has been very little practical experience of building socialism in an advanced industrial country.

The 'Action Programme'

In this connection it might be useful to take a fresh look at the programme of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in 1968. It may be recalled that, at the time, the Action Programme in which the majority leadership of the CPC formulated its first proposals for political and social reform was seen to have much in common with our own *British Road*. Unfortunately, in the heat of arguments about the intervention of August 1968 and its effects we have tended to overlook the need to examine the programme critically on its own merits, detached from the accusations and counter-accusations that have bedevilled the Czechoslovak issue ever since.

Now, eight years after the Warsaw Pact intervention enforced the abandoning, and ultimate condemning, of the Action Programme, many of its propositions concerning socialist democracy can be seen to coincide with the policies advanced by several communist and workers' parties of Western Europe. Speaking on behalf of the Italian Communist Party to the Berlin Conference of European Communist Parties, Comrade Berlinguer pointed out that these parties "have arrived, on the basis of autonomous research, at similar conceptions concerning the road to follow to reach socialism and the characteristics of the socialist society to be built in their countries"—and he referred to the declarations signed by the Italian, Spanish, French and British parties.

The value of the Czechoslovak experience is that, albeit very briefly, the policies could be applied in the conditions of an industrially advanced country, broadly comparable to the countries of Western Europe, where the economic base of socialism was already firmly established. Of course, the problems of remodelling an existing socialist system differed in many respects from those that will occur in the transition from capitalism, and the Czechoslovak communists always insisted that their policies were not for export. Nevertheless, any attempt to construct a democratic system for socialism must surely be of interest to those in Western European countries who are seeking Marxist solutions on these lines.

Democratic Freedoms

In the space of this contribution it is possible only to indicate some points for comparison between the Action Programme and, in our case, the *British Road*. First, there is an overall consensus on the democratic freedoms of speech,

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assembly, travel and so on; in short, as the *British Road* puts it, "civil liberties won through the centuries". There is also agreement on, in the words of the Action Programme, "freedom of speech for minority interests and opinions". While condemning "attempts to put the various classes, strata and groups of socialist society in opposition to each other", the programme declares that "socialism can only flourish if scope is given for the assertion of the various interests of the people and on this basis the unity of the workers will be brought about democratically". And there is reference to past mistakes of overlooking the variety of interests in the name of the unity of society as a whole.

Naturally, each country will have its own institutional forms. For instance, the plurality of political parties did not occupy first place in Czechoslovakia, whereas the formation, or revitalising of existing voluntary organisations of many kinds was seen as an important element in the democratic process. And the role of the Communist Party had to be assessed in the light of its position hitherto as the monopoly instrument of power. The emphasis was on the need for the party not to "enforce its authority" but to win it "again and again by party activity". Here the response in terms of an upsurge in political activity both within and outside the party during the spring and summer of 1968 would repay close study.

There is agreement, too, on the independence of the trade unions under socialism, with their main function being to defend the interests of their members. The Czechoslovak trade union movement gave a lot of thought to this subject and to the development of industrial democracy within a planned socialist economy. The setting up of workers' councils in industry as instruments of "self-management" proved to be among the most fruitful, and lasting, of the 1968 ventures. Differing as it did quite substantially from the Yugoslav system, the workers' council movement deserves much greater attention than it has received hitherto.

The Problem of "Dissent"

What is referred to as the problem of "dissent" was no longer a problem in Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1968, because there was freedom of expression such as we envisage in a socialist Britain. And a feature of the political scene in those days was the lack of vindictive measures against the people whose policies were discarded. This was particularly striking when the truth about the crimes of the Stalin era began to be revealed. These remained a terrible reality for many thousands of people, and only a full and frank reckoning with the past could purge the name of the Communist Party and determine where the guilt lay. Yet no one was tried or sentenced on these grounds, and even the victims called for no revenge.

The phrase "socialism with a human face", which has been associated with the Dubcek leadership, may be inadequate as any such simplistic label must be, but it was first used in the context of the revelations about the past. It was meant to express both the resolve never again to allow a repetition of the crimes, and also not to use the methods of Stalinism against the perpetrators. Indeed, the tolerance was such that many of those involved in acts of judicial murder and repression remained at their posts. This may well have been politically inexpedient, but in the event time was not allowed for the issue to be resolved.

Cut short, too, was the publication of the findings of the Commission set up by the Central Committee in 1968 to examine the show trials of the 1950s. The information gathered by the Commission and contained in its report could be of some help in answering the question put by Comrade Gollan in his article—How could this happen? There is also a draft resolution for the Central Committee with proposals on how to establish a system of government containing safeguards against a repetition of anything resembling the Stalin era.

Silencing the 1968 Leadership

Undoubtedly the months of political ferment up to August 1968 contain lessons both positive and negative about socialist democracy at work. But the intervention from outside prevented the new policies and the party's Action Programme from being put to the democratic test of the Party Congress and a general election. In due course Dubcek and his comrades in the leadership were removed from office and denied the right to voice their views in any way. A number of men and women, communists and socialists, who attempted to state their opinions in a normal democratic way, were held to have acted illegally and were brought to trial in 1972. Some, including Jaroslav Sabata, Milan Hübl and Jiri Müller, are still in prison. Gollan recalls in his article that the British Party, reiterating a declaration made at the time of the

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We regret that, because of rising costs, the price of *Marxism Today* will have to be raised from 30p to 35p, commencing with the January 1977 issue.

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